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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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I am extremely happy that we have this opportunity to gather again.

When we go apart for a while, if it occurs within a joyful and happy state of mind, then naturally when we meet again it will be a very joyous and happy occasion. I mention this specifically as a point for you to consider and remember in life!

Another way to illustrate this is to take the example of a meditation session. If we end the session in a happy and joyous mind, then we would naturally be inclined to engage in meditation again. This is a very significant point to consider.

It is important to ensure that we come out of the meditation session within a joyous mind, so that we will feel encouraged and enthusiastic to engage in the meditation practice again. This would be seen as true by those who have attempted meditation for some time and have some experience with it. Therefore, the joyous feeling of meeting someone again is very much dependent on the state of mind i.e. a kind and considerate attitude towards the other.

This attitude of kindness and genuine consideration for others and the wish to benefit others is a very noble attitude and intention. This really is a precious intention as it is beneficial both for oneself and others. Thus, we need to hold this noble state of mind in high esteem.

The more kindness and genuine consideration we develop towards others, the more the negative states of mind of attachment and anger towards others will be reduced. The mind of attachment and anger causes all of the distress, turbulence and the unhappy state of mind within oneself. When that is reduced, the consequence will naturally be a happier and more joyous state of mind.

Our incomparably kind teacher, the Buddha, mentioned that loving kindness towards others is beneficial for others as well as oneself. When one extends genuine loving kindness towards others, it is appreciated by others, and it helps and soothes their minds, and as explained earlier, it also helps one's own mind to become calm and peaceful. This is why it is mutually beneficial.

How does the attitude of loving kindness and the wish to benefit others actually help and benefit others? The answer is that when one has an attitude of loving kindness to others i.e. a particular wish for others to be happy, one extends every possible means for them to be happy. The wish to benefit others has an element of removing their miseries or sufferings, therefore when one's attitude towards others is based on wishing them to

be happy and to alleviate their misery and suffering, then that is naturally appreciated by others. As I mention regularly, when one practises genuine loving kindness towards others, this is the best way to foster a good relationship, with mutual trust and good companionship.

It is important to understand how the attitude of loving kindness benefits others as well as oneself.

As we cultivate these genuine attitudes of loving kindness, they serve as an antidote for overcoming the attitude of thinking of only one's own interests. When that is overcome, it is replaced by the attitude of taking others into consideration.

When the attitude of self-importance and focus on one's own interests is reduced, then one will naturally be able to adapt to others' wishes and concerns. This will definitely foster a good understanding and appreciation by other people, which helps every aspect of the relationship with others as well.

When one is able to comfortably say, "If it's okay with you, then it's fine with me", this way of thinking definitely helps to reduce a great burden in one's mind and relaxes one's mind.

In contrast, if one has an attitude which says, "although it is your wish, it's not fine with me and I don't accept it!", then that causes a very hurtful state of mind, like being pieced by an arrow.

Extending genuine loving kindness to others is really beneficial for others and oneself and it will definitely help to reduce attachment and anger that cause distress to our own mind, but the fact is that we need to train our mind to adopt these good qualities. Without the training of our mind, the positive attitudes that overcome the negative states of mind will not occur spontaneously.

In order to make an attempt to reduce anger and attachment in one's mind, one needs to train one's mind to gain some control over one's own mind. As we gain more control over our own mind, then we will be more able to control our emotions.

Thus, it is suitable to find a proper method to control one's mind. This method is called meditation.

There are various forms of meditation, but what we are relating to here is a technique which specifically assists one to overcome the various afflictions in one's mind. Anger and attachment are part of the afflictions, so this meditation technique serves as an antidote to overcome anger and attachment as well, which would bring about a really positive effect. In contrast, adopting a meditation technique which merely helps to settle down one's mind and gain some focus, will not bring significant benefit for one's wellbeing in the long run. While engaging in a meditation practice merely to develop a focused mind may have some temporary benefits, it cannot really assist one to overcome the afflictions in one's mind.

If one adopts a meditation technique where one is merely attempting to develop a focused mind - perhaps even single-pointed focus. Then during that meditation session you may feel somewhat settled and calm. However, when you come out of the meditation session and go about your everyday life again, the afflictions may become

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rampant and you become completely controlled by attachment and anger once again. If that occurs, then that is a clear sign that it has not had much of an effect in your life.

When we embark on training our mind with meditation, it is really important to understand what we are attempting to achieve. With the aim to overcome the afflictions within one's mind, initially it is very important that we contemplate the faults of the afflictions, such as anger and attachment. The more we think about the ill-effects or disadvantages of anger, the more likely we are to take the initiative to practise what opposes anger, such as love. The more we meditate on love as an antidote to overcome anger, the more our mind becomes familiar with love, and when we come out of the meditation, it is more likely that our mind has a positive effect of love, on the basis of having seen the disadvantages or ill-effects of anger previously. Initially while we engage in this training, when we come out of the meditation session, there may still be occasions where we get upset or angry due to the immediate circumstances; nevertheless, due to the familiarity of meditating on love the difference would be that the intensity of the anger is not as great and one will not act upon that anger as readily as we had previously. In this way, the intensity of the anger is gradually reduced, which is the positive effect we experience.

It is significant to remember the advice in the third verse of the famous work called *The Eight Verses of Mind Training* by one of the great Kadampa masters Langri Tangpa.

*In all actions, may I examine my mind,  
And as soon as delusions arise  
Endangering myself and others,  
May I firmly face and avert them.*

As Langri Tangpa very effectively explains, in all our actions we need to maintain constant vigilance over our own state of mind. As soon as we notice that an affliction is starting to develop within us, we immediately need to try to apply the antidote to overcome that affliction, in order to prevent harm to oneself and others.

By contemplating this advice and putting it into practice, we are reducing our familiarity with the afflictions. As a result, we will not be swayed by the afflictions and we will not become completely dominated by anger and attachment. Therefore, we will slowly become more able to withhold and not act upon our afflictions. Otherwise, if we fail to notice whenever the afflictions arise, and act accordingly, that is how our familiarity with the afflictions increases and therefore we react more spontaneously.

If one can begin to acknowledge and understand that the inner turmoils and disturbance that one feels within oneself are not entirely dependent on external conditions, but the real cause lies within oneself, then that is already a very good start to working on one's mind.

In summary, as a means to overcome the afflictions which are the cause for our inner turmoil, meditation is really a most effective method.

It is significant to understand how our minds are affected and how the afflictions arise within ourselves. In simple terms, it is due to the connection that we make between our minds and the object that causes particular afflictions to arise in our mind. The connection serves as a condition for the afflictions to become manifest. With regard to attachment, there is an object of attachment (an object that we are attached to) when our mind focuses or makes a connection with the object. Then, due to that connection to the object of attachment, we experience attachment in our mind. The same occurs with anger. When we feel angry, it is in relation to an object, therefore it is due to a connection with the object of anger that the anger arises. In the same way, jealousy is due to the object of jealousy that we start feeling jealous in our mind – it is basically the connection we make with the object.

If it is due to the mind having a connection with the object of an affliction that the affliction arises, then we need to find a method to sever that connection. Therefore, if our mind does not make a connection with that particular object, then that particular affliction will not arise in our mind.

If we were to think about this process, it is not that difficult to sever our connection with the object. Normally we don't even think about it – we allow our mind to focus and make the connection with the object and just carry on with whatever follows, but if we were to actually think about it, it can be quite simple.

I give this illustration to you as friends with whom I can share openly. When you have a particular friend or companion whom you start feeling anger towards, then for as long as that person is in mind, you will experience anger. A simple way to overcome that is if you can just change the object of your focus to a friend whom you feel very affectionate towards. The moment you focus on the second person, when you bring them to mind, you have temporarily forgotten the other person you felt anger towards because you are not focusing on them. Then the anger subsides and you don't feel anger anymore. This doesn't mean that you completely sever your relationship with the friend you are feeling angry towards or seek a separation from them, but temporarily not focusing on them will help to settle the mind of anger. This is just one example.

During a meditation session, when we choose an appropriate object to focus on, by the virtue of focusing single-pointedly on this chosen meditation object, it naturally severs all our connections with other objects which cause the afflictions the arise, such as attachment, anger and jealousy. Therefore, by focusing on this appropriate meditational object, one's mind naturally becomes more settled, calm and free from the turmoils of the afflictions.

This is an introduction to how the meditation practice works. We can leave the specific instructions of how to engage in meditation, such as the sitting postures, for another session – we don't have time to go through that this evening.

The main point this evening is how focusing on adopting a genuine attitude of loving kindness towards others is really the key to one's own happiness. Therefore, if one

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contemplates on the positive effects of loving kindness, one would naturally be inclined to put in every effort to developing a positive attitude of loving kindness. As one develops a genuine sense of loving kindness towards others, it provides a peaceful feeling within oneself. As mentioned earlier, the immediate beneficiary is oneself, as it brings about a genuine sense of well-being and peacefulness within oneself.

Therefore, the way to extend that loving kindness attitude towards others is by contemplating specifically on two aspects in relation to others. By focusing on others, when one sees others experiencing different kinds of suffering or what we call miseries or disadvantages, one develops the feeling of how unfortunate they are to be experiencing such miseries, and how wonderful it would be if they were free from such miseries and suffering. When one extends that attitude, then that is the aspect of what we call 'compassion'. Whereas, when one sees others being deprived of happiness and one feels how unfortunate it is that they are deprived of happiness and how wonderful it would be if they were to be endowed with happiness, then extending a strong feeling of wishing others to be endowed with happiness is the attitude of 'love' towards others. Love and compassion are extended in this way by contemplating others and wishing everyone to have well-being.

As I have mentioned previously, on a personal level I have my daily practice of generating the attitude that I will do everything possible to make others happy and not intentionally cause any suffering for others and may I be able to help others to gain happiness and be free of miseries. When I adopt that attitude and really focus and meditate on it, it is a reasonable and simple attitude to develop, yet it has a very positive effect on my own mind. This is very significant.

If one contemplates and meditates on this attitude of loving kindness - extending well-being to others and specifically focusing on the others, when one sees others distraught and suffering, one develops a genuine wish for them to be free from these sufferings. Also, when one sees others deprived of happiness and well-being, one genuinely cultivates the attitude and wish for them to be happy and endowed with well-being. As one familiarises with this state of mind, it definitely brings about a transformation within oneself. There are times when one can be moved to tears on contemplating loving kindness towards others. As a consequence of the familiarity with this practice, one can reach a point where whoever one encounters, they all appear as close relatives or very close friends, and one is seeing others in a very positive light. When this starts to occur, the most positive transformation is occurring within oneself.

As it is explained in the teachings, love is really one of the most effective antidotes to overcome anger. When the truth of that starts to become apparent, one will begin to see that as one cultivates genuine love towards others, the mind of anger naturally starts to subside and the intensity of anger within oneself is definitely reduced, resulting in one's own mind becoming much more peaceful.

Now we can spend a few minutes in meditation. For those who are familiar, the object of our meditation in the short session here is our own breath.

Although focusing on the breath is a simple technique, it is said to be very effective, especially for a beginner - not that I'm implying that you are all beginners. The main thing is that it is said to be very effective in overcoming an overly active or inactive mind. For anyone who is affected by an overly agitated mind containing a lot of disturbing conceptions, then making a genuine attempt to focus on one's breath and allow a few minutes to settle down one's mind, will definitely help to reduce this overly active and agitated state of mind.

A hyperactive state of mind follows every disturbing concept, so to apply this meditation technique effectively, one needs to make a commitment that 'for the next few minutes, I will not allow my mind to follow all the normal whimsical thoughts, but instead I will bring my focus within and place my full attention on my breath. Based on the natural rhythm of the breath, I will follow every in-breath and out-breath and keep a 100 per cent focus only on the breath itself'.

In this way for the next few minutes, we will make a genuine attempt to adopt this meditation technique.

*[Pause for single-pointed meditation]*

While maintaining our focused mind, we can now change the object of our focus to the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is the name of Buddha Shakyamuni. As we hear the sound of the mantra, we keep our focus on that, and when the recitation subsides, maintain the awareness of our inner focus just for a few moments.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA.

That is the session for this evening, and we will continue gradually in our next sessions. I would like to thank you all for paying such great attention.

I have shared a few words which might have been beneficial for you. If that is the case, then that will be my small gift for you, after returning from my overseas trip to India.

It is a gift which, if you were to consider and pay attention to the words, you might be able to get more and more benefit - which is unlike a gift that is gone soon after one receives it!

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incredibly positive effects; there is a lot to gain from these positive states of mind, and that is something that one begins to notice through one's experience.

So, in summary, further developing and increasing the positive states of mind is the real source of happiness in life.

Whilst acknowledging that the positive states of mind are something to be protected and further increased the question now is whether one is able to do that effectively on a regular basis or not? If one finds that it is bit of a struggle, that it is difficult to protect and increase the positive states of mind, then one needs to question whether there is an obstacle or an obstruction towards doing so? If there is an obstruction or obstacle, then it will be useful to identify that, because these obstacles can be a hindrance and obstruction to one's further development.

So, what I am presenting here is actually a way for you to reflect on and think about this point. That in itself can be like a form of meditation, where the mind becomes quite settled. So, it can be quite effective even as a practice to settle down one's mind.

When we take this investigation further, and consider what is the obstruction or obstacle, for our positive states of mind to emerge and to be prevalent, then that obstacle is what we call the 'afflictions'.

There are various afflictions, and these afflictions are the main cause for not being able to establish a positive mind. Through reflection, we can identify these afflictions as being an obstruction or obstacle. This point is not something that is not too obscure; rather it is something that we can recognise.

To give an example of how an affliction is an obstruction to using our positive states of mind and to bring happiness to others, we can use anger. Now when anger dominates one's mind, and one expresses anger towards others, does that contribute to others' happiness, or does that help one to be happy and joyful?, Does that help one's expression to be gentle and nice towards others? So, the answer should be quite clear because of our own experience. When anger is prevalent, and we act out of anger, it is not something really pleasant for others, or appreciated by others, not to mention the disturbance it causes our own state of mind.

Likewise, for other afflicted states of mind that can cause distress, for example jealousy. When one's attitude or one's expression is tainted with jealousy that is not something which is appreciated by others. And when it is tainted with competitiveness towards others, then that is also something that is not appreciated by others. If one's attitudes or gestures are tainted with ill-will or harmful intentions, that is also not appreciated by others, and likewise with pride and so forth.

Of course, if we don't pay particular attention, and we don't think about this, it may not be immediately obvious so therefore this requires specific, honest investigation within oneself as to how these afflicted states of mind are harmful to oneself and others.

These states of mind, which are called the afflicted states of mind, cause us to experience stress and unhappiness.

These main causes are within, one's jealousy, anger and so forth, reside nowhere else but within oneself.

And just as these afflicted states of mind cause turmoil within our minds, they also have negative consequences for our physical body. We can start to feel discomfort, and aches and pains within our body, and there are even times when they can cause obstruction to one's breathing. This is something that some of you may notice.

Therefore, if one can adopt a method or technique where one's mind is not swayed or dominated by these afflictions, but rather one is able to control one's own mind - instead of the mind being controlled by the afflictions, then that would be really a good thing to do.

So, the method by which we can train our mind so that we can gain control, so that one's mind is not swayed or influenced by the afflictions, is precisely the technique that we adopt here called meditation.

Meditation is a technique that involves choosing an appropriate object which does not cause afflictions to arise in one's mind. Therefore, when one makes the decision to place one's focus one hundred percent on the appropriate meditation object, then by the virtue of focusing on that, combined with the decision of not to allow one's mind to cause affliction to arise, the turmoil in the mind will naturally subside.

Because one is creating distance between the object that causes afflictions to arise, and one's mind, the mind actually becomes calmer and more settled.

When we practise this meditation appropriately and effectively, then it will naturally cause the mind to become calm and distanced from the earlier state of mind which is influenced by afflictions. It is as if our mind is like the hustle and bustle of a crowd. That very hyperactive sort of mind, with all the various different thoughts and attitudes that are fuelled by the afflictions, will start to subside and consequently one gets a genuine sense of relief.

And when this is maintained, and when we engage in this practice regularly, then gradually our mind becomes more and more stable, and our state of mind becomes more and more positive, and that is how we reap the benefits of meditation.

Of course, this may not come about right away. First, we need to contemplate and think about the purpose of meditation, and how it actually works, and the effectiveness of it. Then when we apply the meditation technique with that understanding, gradually we can gain the benefit.

So, as I have often shared with you, when the mind is disturbed with any particular afflictions arising within it, one of the immediate and best remedies is to create distance from the object that is causing the affliction to arise. Take anger as an example; when one is feeling anger towards an object, whatever that object it may be, perhaps another person, then the more we focus on that object it will fuel the anger even further to the point where anger becomes like a blazing fire within oneself. It can become intense like a blazing fire. By dwelling on the object, the more you think about the object that is the

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cause of anger, it is only natural that it will fuel and increase anger.

Therefore, when one begins to notice anger arising in relation to an object, if one can immediately take note of that. In order to prevent anger from escalating, just change one's focus from the object. One could actually focus on anger itself, rather than the object that causes anger. Just think about anger, its very nature, what is anger? If I allow anger to escalate and continue to dwell in my mind, if I do not stop this mind of anger, what will the consequences and the disadvantages be?

By thinking in this way, because of the change of focus, and by contemplating the ill effects of anger itself, then naturally the mind of anger will subside. If we can really apply this in such situations, we will really see the benefit.

In fact, there are specific instructions in the teachings regarding the disturbing conceptions arising in the mind. Specifically, when one's mind is affected by disturbing conceptions, focussing on the disturbing conception itself is a method to enable those disturbing conceptions to subside.

If we understand the proper method and techniques of meditation, and also the effectiveness of meditation, and to take this to heart and actually apply it, it will definitely bring about positive effects in one's life; we will gradually become happier and more joyful. It is in this way that one gains benefit from the meditation practice.

So, having introduced the effectiveness and the benefits of the meditation practice, and if one is inclined to adopt the meditation practice, then one would want to know what does it require on the physical level, what does one need to do? How do we adopt our physical body in order to practice meditation? What kinds of states of mind are needed? How do we prepare ourselves mentally? These are reasonable questions to ask and to understand, because of course the reality is, that whatever activity we engage in requires both aspects of our being, our physical activity requiring physical actions, and our mental attitude, and the mind thinking about it.

With meditation, similarly there is a physical aspect, and we need to adopt ourselves in a certain physical aspect, as well as mentally. And then also one considers what are the conducive conditions for one's meditation practice, i.e. recognising the conducive conditions and understanding the obstructive conditions. So, all of this would be useful to understand.

So, the way that I present all of this is really in a practical way which is based on a reasonable sequence, and this can help you to really take an interest in meditation based on your understanding through reasoning and logic, rather than just accepting it. In fact, whatever activity you engaged in is most effective if it is based on sound reasoning and logic.

Now with the limited time that we have, we may not be able to cover all of these points, but perhaps I can just briefly go through the physical posture and then we can continue.

When I give the instructions about the physical posture, for those who can adopt it, then you can adopt that posture for your meditation.

So the point of the physical posture for meditation is to sit straight, and straight means that one is not leaning back, forward or sideways too much, but rather to have an erect straight posture.

The significance of having one's body straight for meditation practice is said to be in order allow the energy channels within our body to be straightened out. When the energy channels are straightened, then it allows the subtle wind energy to flow well within our body. Then will then have the positive effect of one's mind becoming more focussed in our meditation. Furthermore, a practical benefit of having a straight body is that it will help to prevent drowsiness and sleep from occurring.

Part of the physical instructions for those who are able is to sit in a full lotus or half lotus posture. There is a significance in adopting the full lotus or half lotus posture. Although there are more profound explanations from other tantric point of view, for now we will talk about the practical benefit. It is said to be that for those who undertake prolonged meditation, a comfortable position like that actually helps one to be stable for a longer period of time.

Then with the hands, the right hand is placed over the left and the thumbs touch together to form a triangle, and then it is placed four centimetres below our navel.

The significance of this hand gesture is, that by the thumbs touching together, and because of the endings of the channels in the thumbs, there is a particular consequence of inducing love and compassion within one's heart when one is doing meditation, by allowing heat energy to develop within oneself.

Then with the position of the head, one's head shouldn't be held up too high, but tilted slightly forward. Having one's head slightly tilted forward is said to help prevent excitement from arising during our meditation.

The instructions that are presented for the eyes are that one shouldn't have the eyes wide open because that can also cause excitement to occur during meditation, and also not to have them completely closed, as that can bring about laxity and also cause drowsiness. The right positioning is explained as to be for one to lower one's eyes in order to just see the tip of one's nose; that is this appropriate position for the eyes.

And with one's shoulders and arms, they shouldn't be brought out too far, but also not clenched tight.

Likewise, with one's jaw, the teeth and the lips should also be in a position where they are not completely closed and not clenched tight, but also not open, but rather resting in their natural state. If mouth or the jaw were completely closed, then that prevents the air flow within our body and within our mouth, and thus that can also cause complications in our meditation, and if the mouth is completely open, then that causes dryness in the mouth.

So, we position the tongue with the tip of the tongue touching the roof of one's mouth behind the front teeth,

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and that helps, on the one hand to keep the mouth moist, and it also prevents too much saliva from forming which might cause one to start drooling; that wouldn't be appropriate in meditation.

At the end of these instructions it finally says that one should adopt the most comfortable position for one's meditation. This is a significant point because if the meditation posture was limited or restricted to only adopting a specific posture, then for some it might actually be an obstruction for focusing your mind, if you are not comfortable in that position. Therefore, it is mentioned to ultimately adopt a comfortable position.

Then next we come to identifying the meditational object, and describing what that meditational object needs to be. There are of course quite detailed explanations on that, but we can maybe leave it for next session. For now, the object that we regularly focus on for our purpose of meditation here, it is our own breath.

We use our own breath as the object to focus on, and to bring our full attention and focus on the breath we need to make a commitment to do so, to withdraw our focus from all distracting objects that our mind is normally distracted with. There are so many different thoughts and ideas and disturbing concepts because the mind is very scattered in that way, and we are not able to harness the full potential and power of our mind because it is all scattered.

So in order to harness the full potential and power and ability of our mind, we need to bring the mind itself to one point, to focusing on one appropriate object, and then we will be able to utilise the full potential of our mind. And so this also indicates the significance of the chosen object upon which one brings one's full attention and focus.

So, for the next few minutes we will focus on our breath.

*(Meditation)*

While maintaining your focus, we can now change the object of our focus to be placed upon the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is the name of Buddha Shakyamuni, and when the recitation subsides, just try to maintain that inner awareness or inner focus for a few moments, and that will suffice for our meditation.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

That will be sufficient for now.

You have all paid very good attention so I really appreciate that; thank you very much.

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these qualities and makes the object look more beautiful than it actually is, which causes the longing and desire for the object. In the meditation of focusing on the imperfections of the object, one is focusing on and analysing the natural imperfections. By focusing on the natural imperfections, the earlier mind of seeing the object as completely appealing and beautiful is nullified, as we are now focusing on the aspects of the object that are not so attractive or appealing. So it directly counteracts the mind of seeing the object as completely appealing and beautiful. This is how the earlier mind of attachment is overpowered by the meditation on imperfections. If we gradually adopt this meditation, we will slowly notice that our attachments become less and less.

A particular example of objects of attachment, more commonly to those affected by desire and longing, is the body; attachment either to our own body or the beautiful bodies of others.

Whether it is in relation to our own body (assuming that one has a beautiful physique) or being overly obsessed and attached with the bodies of others, the attachment arises by perceiving the body as being really beautiful and appealing. If it appears as beautiful, then the mind exaggerates the qualities of that body. This is how the mind of attachment perceives the body. Here, meditating on the imperfections of the body means using logic, not just blindly, but through logic investigating the actual object, which in this case is the body, and asking and investigating, 'where is the beauty?' 'Which part of it is really beautiful?'

First of all, we investigate the skin and then go beyond the skin. If it's just the exterior part, which may seem appealing right away, but the skin is only so deep. Peel away the skin and beyond the skin we come to the flesh and the muscles and beyond, that is, the skeletal and internal organs. So it is in this way, when we investigate thoroughly from the bottom of the feet all the way to the top of our head and scrutinise how the body is, what is it made up of, then the natural imperfections will become very apparent to our mind. This is one way to counteract the earlier faulty perceptions of seeing a body as completely appealing and beautiful. There are other forms of this meditation as well, but this is one easy way that we can relate to using our logical investigation.

When we check the nature of the body, it brings to mind the natural imperfections of the body; then we will realise that it is not as appealing and beautiful in the way that we perceived earlier. When we initially perceive the body to be beautiful, it comes with an underlying notion that the beautiful and appealing body exists independently out there, and is an intrinsically never changing beautiful object. We have this concrete perception of the beautiful body, but through this investigation, we will come to realise for ourselves that the perception held by the mind of attachment is an incorrect perception. This comes to light when we start to peel away and look beyond that exterior appearance.

As mentioned earlier, there are other forms of meditation to see the imperfections of the body, which are presented in the Buddhist text known as *Abhidharma*. It is a graphic meditation and some may find it confronting, but this meditation is an effective way to overcome attachment to the body. There is a particular meditation where we perceive half of the body to be skeletal and the other half to be open flesh with blood oozing out. If we bring that vision to mind and overlay it upon the image of the earlier object of

attachment, this will immediately nullify the attachment to that body.

Likewise, there is a meditation to overcome the predominant affliction that most of us suffer from – anger. Anger is a readily known affliction that causes distress to our mind. Anyone who has experienced intense anger knows from experience that the mind is not in a happy and calm state when we are angry. Just as exaggerates the qualities and seeing the object as appealing, anger perceives the object as one hundred percent unappealing, and only focuses on the faults and the imperfections of the object. By focusing merely on the faults and exaggerating them, we feel anger and hostility towards the object. As a remedy, there are particular meditations that serve as an antidote to overcome the faulty state of mind and as a way to reduce anger. It is advised that we meditate on love for the object, particularly if it is an animate object. Love has an element of seeing the object as endearing and appealing in a more positive way. As we start to generate love towards the object, the mind of anger and hostility towards the object will be reduced. In such ways meditation offers many practical ways of dealing with afflictions in the mind that cause us so much distress.

There are other similar meditations to overcome specific afflictions in our mind. While these may seem a bit more elaborate and advanced to begin with, and we find them a bit hard right away, another method that we can use is focusing on our breath. This simple meditation technique is very effective for settling down the mind, particularly for a mind that is highly agitated and disturbed and has a lot of discursive thoughts. For such a busy state of mind, initially the practice of just focusing on our breath is very effective and is more appropriate for someone who is struggling with wandering thoughts and not being able to keep their attention and focus well. If, when someone is angry, you present a meditation technique by saying, 'you should meditate on love or meditate on patience; and meditate on the imperfections of an object' will be too much for them at that moment. But giving them a simple technique to just focus on the breath is something manageable, and easy to do and yet effective for settling down the mind.

In the last session, we covered some of the specifics of the ideal posture that we can adopt for the meditation practice. The specifics on what we are attempting to achieve in our meditation on the mental level is what we call 'mental stabilisation'. In order to develop mental stabilisation, first of all, we have to recognise obstructions, the states of mind that oppose mental stabilisation, namely excitement and laxity. There are specific methods and techniques of identifying what laxity and mindfulness are. The antidotes to overcoming excitement and laxity are mindfulness and introspection respectively. I can go into more detail in future sessions.

Mental stabilisation is achieved when we are able to single-pointedly focus on an inner object for as long as we wish. That is the definition of mental stabilisation. We have developed mental stabilisation when we are able to single-pointedly focus on an inner object as opposed to an external object for as long as we wish. In order to achieve that, we start from the beginning the practice of understanding of what we want to achieve. Initially we need to understand and identify what the conditions and obstructing conditions are to be able to achieve mental stabilisation. We all have the conducive conditions we need to achieve and remove the obstructing conditions. Thus, with meditation particularly,

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with developing mental stabilisation we need to understand the conducive and obstructing conditions.

All that we choose for our meditation regularly here is our own breath. There is significance of using the breath as an object. In order to apply this meditation technique properly, we need to be committed not to allow our mind to be distracted by normal distracting thoughts in relation to external objects. In other words, we withdraw our attention from all external objects and bring our full attention and focus on the breath itself. Here we are focusing on the image of the breath; imagine the breath coming in and going out. There are also specific instructions on how we should be breathing during that time. The breath itself should be free from sound when breathing. The breath coming in and out through our nostrils should be free from a laboured breath, such as breathing in and out loudly and deeply, and also be free from taking in small breaths and exhaling out long breaths. Thus, we focus on our natural breath maintaining a natural breathing rhythm; that is, basically how we normally breathe. We don't make any sounds when breathing in and out normally, and we don't breathe in deeply or shallowly but naturally. So we use our natural rhythm and then bring our full attention and focus just on the breath itself, and being aware when breathing in, 'now I am breathing in' and when breathing out, 'now the breath is leaving'. This is advised for beginners. When the mind is able to maintain the focus for a while, we will start to experience a joyous state of mind. Within that joyous state of mind, it is good to then come out of the meditation temporarily and not go on for too long, because as beginners we have not yet mastered focus for too long. If we attempt to focus for too long, then our mind will start getting distracted while not noticing that the mind has become distracted. If distraction becomes a habit of a mind seemingly focused but not entirely focused, then that itself can become a bad habit in our meditation. In brief, the quantity is not important but rather the quality - a short time but with a good focus. So for the next few minutes, we will adopt the meditation.

*(meditation)*

In this relatively focused state of mind, we can now just change the object of our focus to the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's name. As we hear this sound of the mantra, we maintain our focus on that sound and when the recitation subsides, we try to maintain the inner awareness.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

That will be sufficient for tonight unless someone has a good question. Geshe-la says we can address one question.

*Question:* What is the best way to keep a focused mind in a very noisy environment? As I'm currently staying in a rehabilitation centre, it can be a very busy and noisy place!

*Answer:* Of course the technique that was presented earlier, to focus on our breath, is a meditation technique that can help the situation. But for beginners, it is advised to find an environment little bit more conducive such as a quiet place because if there's a lot of distractions and noise near you, then it is hard for beginners to just focus on their breath adequately. Ideally it is good to find a quiet place.

One of the conditions and causes for internal busyness and turmoil in the mind seems to be very much related to

bringing up past memories. So if we can find a quiet place we can start to acknowledge our past memories, whether they are good or uncomfortable memories, and then to temporarily leave them aside. If we can train ourselves to not to dwell too much on those memories, then it will help to quieten down the mind. In fact, when we engage in this meditation by just focusing on the breath, it is best done by not bringing up any memories of the past or speculations of the future, but just being fully aware of the breath itself. The reason we feel settled and in a calm state of mind, even during a short period of being able to focus or attempting to focus on the breath, is because temporarily we are not dwelling on past memories, and just by the virtue of doing that we feel relieved. That shows if we normally dwell too much with past memories, it can cause turmoil in the mind.

If we can begin to lessen our obsession with past memories, and if we don't make an attempt to remember them, our mind will just go on its natural way. Otherwise it might be that the mind has become habituated and fixated on certain past memories that cause us turmoil and make us feel uncomfortable. It may seem that our mind just naturally goes back again and again to certain memories. However, that is because of the habituation we have formed in our mind and the pattern and way of thinking. In order to break that cycle, we need to make a specific attempt. It is not easy and it does not come about right away but gradually over time we can be free of that pattern of thinking. We may start thinking about a certain thing and it brings us a feeling of agony, feelings of guilt and uncomfortable feelings, and the more we dwell on that, the more the mind becomes more disturbed and agitated. So, when we can recognise that, we try to think of another object. Focusing on the breath is an example of focusing on another object that does not cause distress and disturbance to the mind. We can all identify that when certain memories and thoughts occur they disturb us. And if they don't occur in our mind, we feel relaxed. Therefore, those particular thoughts and memories that cause distress and agitation in the mind are the ones we try not to focus on, and we try to divert our attention from them, slowly through our meditation practice. This is for beginners. When we have gained control of our mind, then there are certain memories that may be useful when we bring them up. It can be useful as a cautionary method and to learn something from, as a way to prevent future mishaps. That is something that comes later, when we have further control of our mind. But in the beginning for beginners, it is best not to focus on those things.

Thank you for that good question. Your question would have been something that many others could have related to as well so you have asked on behalf of many others.

Thank you very much for paying such good attention and listening very well.

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor  
Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena  
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Edited Version  
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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

28 February 2018

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Please adopt a comfortable, relaxed posture and make sure that you don't lose the peaceful feeling within your mind.

Indeed, when remaining relaxed and comfortable physically, if we are able to maintain a composed, quiet and focused mind, it brings about a calmer and more peaceful mind.

As we can easily manage to sit comfortably relaxed for a period of time, we may be able to contain our mind and focus for a few minutes as well. However, what we would notice is that our mind very quickly starts to become distracted following disturbing discursive thoughts again. If this is the situation, it is reasonable to question why it is so. Why is it that we are not able to contain our mind for a significant period of time? Why does it get so easily distracted again?

In pondering this question, if we were to do an honest inner search, we would come to acknowledge that it is because we have an uncontrolled and untamed mind. When we don't have adequate control over our own mind, it is easily influenced by afflicted distractions. When the mind is more controlled, we will be able to maintain our focus steadily for a longer period of time. We can use the illustration of well-trained pets; when they have been trained well they are easily controlled. For example, they will sit outside a shop very quietly until the owner comes out. So, if the mind is not controlled, it is easily influenced by distractions and excessive thinking. Having excessive thinking might not be such a bad thing if it did not cause distress. However, the excessive thinking that we normally engage in is relation with objects that cause afflictions to arise in the mind. As a consequence, we often have an unsettled state of mind, which is scattered. We feel empty and we don't have sense of peace in our mind. That is the consequence of having an unsubdued mind.

If we don't lessen the discursive states of mind, or make attempts to lessen distractions, it is really hard for the mind to be genuinely calm and tranquil. As I sometimes say half-jokingly, if we were to verbalise whatever goes in our mind, people would probably think that we have gone crazy.

If we can ensure that we contain our mind where our physical body is, and not allow it to be dispersed in every direction, then that is the beginning of this mind training practice that we call meditation. This can be understood with simple reasoning or logic. We don't need profound logic to understand this. For example, if someone who is writing has a pen and paper and is sitting somewhere comfortably, and their mind is really focused on the writing they are doing, the writing will be much more effective. In contrast if the mind is scattered, then even if they attempt to write, they will make many mistakes. That is similar in any other work situation.

Thus, if the mind is not settled and focused we will experience a lot of difficulties in whatever we intend to do.

This is true in a worldly context, as well as in spiritual endeavour. In meditation, our physical body may be in a meditative posture, but if the mind is not settled and focused a meditator will experience a lot of difficulties. This is also true in a work environment. There might be situations where someone is dressed smartly and appropriately and is in a pleasant environment. Then, while they are writing or doing something, a memory may occur to them and they cry. These are actual situations we can definitely see.

What I am emphasising here is the necessity of familiarising our own mind with being more steady and focused. That familiarity is something we need to have and it comes through training.

This is where the significance of meditation practice comes in. When we engage in meditation, we are applying a technique where we are training our mind to be focused on an appropriate chosen object. 'Appropriate' object implies that we do not choose a meditation object that causes afflictions to arise in the mind. The literal meaning of the word meditation from Tibetan is 'to familiarise', which implies 'familiarising the mind with a positive object'. Familiarising our mind in a positive way will have a positive effect on our speech and physical actions as well.

Training one's mind to focus on an appropriate object, will influence appropriate physical behaviour and speech, which contributes to making others happy. The more one trains one's mind in a positive way, the more our negative verbal and physical actions reduce. As this positive transformation takes place within an individual, it will definitely be noticed, and others will then begin to really appreciate that there is a positive change in an individual who takes up this practice.

When one adopts a practice of focusing inwards and having an honest investigation of oneself, a positive state of mind can be adopted and negative states can be discarded. When one recognises that, one is able to abandon the negative and adopt the positive. This is a very worthwhile practice. Rather than being obsessed with constantly being judgemental and looking at others' faults, it is much more helpful to take personal responsibility for oneself.

In this way, we begin to understand the effectiveness of meditation practice and we will be able to apply targeted meditation practices to overcome specific afflictions in our mind. For example, if someone, due to intense attachment, experiences an agitated state of mind, the advice is to meditate on the imperfection of the object of attachment. Focusing on the imperfections of the object will cause that intense attachment to reduce and that individual will experience a relief of the agitation that it causes. For certain individuals anger might be more of an immediate problem. For someone who is affected by intense anger, the advice is to engage in meditation on love towards the object, or focus on cultivating patience. These are effective remedies or antidotes to overcome anger.

For someone who is particularly affected with discursive or disturbing thoughts the best remedy is to just focus on one's breath. It would not be ideal for someone who is affected by a lot of discursive or disturbing thoughts to meditate on something more elaborate. These kinds of meditations would not work. The best remedy for them is to focus on the breath. This will help to settle the discursive thoughts in one's mind. This is the real benefit of meditation practice. Being able to focus single-pointedly on a particular object for a length of time is, in itself, not so remarkable. If it does not

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really help to overcome the afflictions in the mind then the benefit is very limited.

Having given an introduction to the effectiveness and purpose of meditation, we now come to the application of the actual method of meditation. I have already covered in our last sessions about how to adopt the physical posture.

We need to first understand what it is that we are trying to achieve in meditation. The technical term is meditative concentration, which is also understood as single-pointedness, or being able to single-pointedly focus on a chosen object. So, what is meditative concentration?

Meditative concentration is the combination of having a single-pointed focus on the meditation object with a clear and lucid mind that has an intense focus on the object.

Having defined meditative concentration, the next question is how do we achieve this meditative concentration? Firstly, there are conducive conditions that will assist us to develop meditative concentration and adverse conditions that we need to avoid. Of course, this is true for anything we wish to achieve.

There are two main obstructions and two main antidotes for overcoming the obstructions to developing meditative concentration. Excitement is the obstruction to single-pointedness, and the obstruction to a clear and lucid mind is laxity. Thus, excitement and laxity are the two main obstructions for developing meditative concentration.

There is a particular reason in using the term 'excitement' rather than distraction. Excitement is caused mainly by objects of attachment. While distractions in general can be caused by objects of anger and other afflictions as well. Sometimes one can even be distracted by positive states of mind. However, the obstruction here is specifically excitement because it is an object of attachment that causes our mind to lose focus on the meditation object. The mind comes wanders off the object that we are meant to be focusing on. To further emphasise the point, overcoming excitement is important because separating from the object of attachment is very difficult.

As explained in great detail in the teaching by the great master Shantideva, when one is strongly attached to an object, then due to the strong familiarity, it is almost as if the mind becomes inseparable from it. It is hard to imagine being without the object of attachment. When it reaches that point it becomes very, very difficult indeed to separate our focus from the object of attachment.

Overcoming an obsession with focusing on an object of anger is a bit easier because the agitation that is caused by anger is much more noticeable to our mind. The ill-effect of attachment is hard to recognise. Thus, it is difficult to separate from it. When we are focusing on the breath as a meditation object, we may start even thinking about positive things such as love or compassion. These are virtuous and positive thoughts. However, if one is attempting to develop single-pointed meditative concentration, one needs to be consistent in focusing on one particular object. Until one develops that concentration, even thinking about positive things such as love and compassion is a distraction for the purpose of achieving meditative concentration. Although not a negative distraction, for this particular purpose even that is considered a distraction.

Laxity, the next obstruction, is where the mind becomes duller. While one may still be focused on the object, one loses clarity and lucidity, and the intensity of the mind

wanes. Of course, as with excitement there are gross and subtle laxities. We do not need to go into great detail about the distinction between these now. On a grosser level, it is more noticeable, while subtle levels are harder to notice. Gross levels are where one might be focused on the object slightly, but then because it is duller the object is not as clear, the mind is not as fresh and the intensity of the focus begins to wane.

As with obstructions, there are two main conducive conditions that are required to develop meditative concentration. These are called mindfulness and introspection. Mindfulness is a mind of having a constant remembrance of the object. In a worldly context we would say, 'Oh, I remember so and so'. When you miss someone, you might say, 'Oh, they come to mind'.

Certain memories can cause distress. With meditation practice and our daily life, we can apply logic and reasoning. It is suggested during the meditation training, not to focus on another object, so that we can bring full attention and focus onto the chosen meditation object. Likewise, the effectiveness and practical benefit of that can be applied in normal situations. Constantly thinking about objects that cause distress will continue to cause us more distress and more mental agony. The most practical advice that can be applied here is just to forget about that object, don't focus on it. Think about something else. Changing or switching one's focus can reduce the agony in our mind.

For mindfulness as an aid to developing meditative concentration, there are said to be three main attributes. I have mentioned in the past that I have experience of how bringing certain objects to mind can cause distress, but bringing other objects to mind can cause more soothing and relaxed states of mind.

Mindfulness is said to be focusing on an object with which one has past familiarity. We cannot remember something with which we don't have prior familiarity. So, focus on an object we have prior familiarity with. It is appropriate to choose a meditation object with which one already has some familiarity because it is much easier to focus on that object rather than choosing a random object or something with which we are not familiar and which we don't understand.

The second attribute is to single-pointedly hold that object of familiarity in one's mind. The third attribute, after familiarity and holding single-pointedly, is not allowing the focused object to waver. That is the function of mindfulness. The main point really here is to focus on an object with which one has prior familiarity, hold that object single-pointedly and not allow the mind to waver or lose focus on the object. When these three are applied, one is applying mindfulness.

When one holds the focus on that chosen meditation object, it is said that one needs to have an intense focus on the object. However, the advice is that one needs to be careful not to hold the object too tightly. If the mind is too tight or too tense while focusing on the object, that can be an obstruction which can cause excitement to arise in the mind. At the same time one needs to be careful that one's focus on the object is not too loose either. When it is too loose it can cause laxity to arise.

Therefore, it is important to find the right balance of focusing on the object i.e. not too tight nor too loose. That right measure is something which would come with experience for someone who has made genuine progress in meditation practice. When one is focusing on an object, one

needs to have the right measure of intensity. When one finds the right intensity, the clarity of the object will increase, the appearance will be very clear and one will have a lucid state of mind. When the focus on the object has reached the point where it is clear and lucid we are making genuine progress in developing meditative concentration.

Now we come to introspection, the next conducive condition for developing concentration. Introspection is a state of mind which periodically checks whether one is focused on the object or not. It is like a guard. Basically, its function is to guard and check whether one's mind is focused on the object or not. We do not need to apply introspection throughout our meditation, but introspection should always be in the background, periodically checking our focus on the object. If we find that our focus on the object has lapsed and our mind has wandered off due to either excitement or laxity, we need to reapply our focus. The intensity, clarity and lucidity of our mind needs to be reassessed. If our focus has been steady, just continue. We need not apply extra effort there. This is how one uses introspection.

To use the breath as an example, when using the breath as an object of focus, by understanding the conducive and obstructing conditions that are needed to be able to focus well on the breath, one's ability to focus on the breath becomes more manageable and constructive. We make sure that our mind is not distracted by using introspection. Applying mindfulness and introspection while focusing on the breath can be understood in that simple way. For beginners, it is said that it is good to meditate even for just a few minutes. If a point is reached where one is able to have clear focus on the breath, it is good then to come out of the meditation and not to meditate for too long because, for beginners, seemingly good meditation can easily lapse into distracted mind. Continuing to maintain meditative posture while the mind is distracted is not a healthy approach for beginners because a bad habit where we are seemingly in meditation, but the mind is still distracted. It is better to have a short session and maintain a joyous state of mind. The quality is much more important than the quantity.

To be more specific, first make an attempt to focus on the object, in this case the breath, for one minute. If we can achieve focus on the object for one minute, then we should temporarily be satisfied with that and come out of the meditation with a joyous state of mind. After that we will be able to willingly and joyfully meditate again. If we come out of the meditation session feeling quite tired, we will not be too enthusiastic about going into meditation again. Therefore, start with a minute's focus and when that is done well, increase to a minute and a half, then gradually two minutes and so forth. This is how one gradually increases the duration of focus on the object comfortably and without distraction.

The optimum state of reaching meditative concentration is to develop what is called 'mental serenity' or 'calm abiding'. There are actually nine stages to developing one's meditative concentration and those nine stages are to be followed one stage at a time. Firmness and stability is the first stage of the meditative concentration, then one proceeds to the second stage and so forth. One cannot skip those stages and try to develop calm abiding right away

In summary, we need to check our mind and observe what state of mind we are in. Assess and investigate whether we are in a positive state or negative state of mind, then think about the actual process of meditation. This is a form of

meditation that would fall into a particular category of meditation called analytical meditation. So, there is stabilising meditation and analytical meditation. Stabilising meditation is where one tries to develop single-pointed meditative concentration, whereas analytical meditation is where we use intelligence to think about certain points by systematically going over them.

It is advised for beginners that between analytical and stabilising meditation, analytical meditation is actually much more effective than stabilising meditation. This is mentioned by the great master, Lama Tsongkhapa. He is advising us from his own experience and his practice.

Analytical meditation is also utilised very much in other topics that we learn in the teachings, such as developing the altruistic mind. The mind of awakening is a very altruistic state of mind which has seven stages of development. This is called the seven-point cause and effect technique of developing the altruistic mind of enlightenment. The seven stages are recognising all beings as being one's mother, thinking about their kindness, wishing to repay their kindness, meditating on love, followed by meditating on compassion and then meditating the superior intention. Thinking about each of these stages is part of analytical meditation. It really helps the mind to really settle down and think about these points. One does not use analytical meditation and completely leave aside stabilising meditation. They are to be used in conjunction. First one analyses, then one focuses and stabilises one's mind on the conclusion of that analysis. This is how to use analytical and stabilising meditation in unison.

As usual we choose our breath as an object of focus. This means that we bring our full attention and focus upon the breath, not allowing our mind to be distracted with the other thoughts and objects. We completely withdraw our mind from other disturbing or distracting thoughts and place it completely entirely on the breath, being fully aware of only the breath. Meditate in this way for the next few minutes.

*[Meditation]*

While maintaining a focused mind, change the object of our focus to the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is the name of Buddha Shakyamuni. When the recitation subsides try to maintain that inner focus for a few moments.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo  
Edit 1 by Carla Betros  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
Edited Version  
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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཇུག་ལམ་རིམ་འགྲིང་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

7 March 2018

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As usual, it would be good to spend some time in meditation.

In previous sessions, we covered the requirements for adopting the correct physical posture and mental state for meditation, particularly in regard to the use of mindfulness and introspection as a means of developing a single pointed focus on the object.

Another important element in ensuring we have a more meaningful meditation practice is to set the proper motivation before we begin. First of all, we can think about the implications of meditation. In meditation, we train the mind to become familiar with focusing on a positive object. This is what meditation really means. We all like to have positive things in our life. In fact, a driving force is our desire for good things. So, it is quite natural to wish for goodness in ourselves.

We naturally wish for good and appealing things in our life. However, in order to acquire them we usually focus on external objects. In doing so, we fail to acknowledge that what we really need to focus on is having a positive state of mind. A positive state of mind promotes a genuine sense of goodness and happiness. By failing to recognise and understand this point, we instinctively focus outwards, continuously pursuing external objects—specifically, objects relating to our five senses, i.e. sights which appeal to our eyes, sounds which appeal to our ears, tastes which appeal to our taste buds, smells which appeal to our nose and tactile sensations which appeal to our sense of touch. Generally, we focus on these sensual external objects.

We place a lot of attention and focus on the sense objects because they are indeed essential for our existence. We could say ‘ah we can’t blame ourselves for pursuing sense objects because we need them for our survival in our everyday lives!’ However the question is, ‘is it really making us happy?’

To give a more specific illustration of how focusing on the sense objects can in fact cause distress in our mind, we can take the example of eye sense objects. Basically, objects of the eye sense are explained as being ‘forms’— shapes and colours. So our eye sense focuses on attractive forms and, as a consequence, desire and attachment arise in our mind.

In contrast, when we see an unattractive or unappealing form, it can cause aversion to arise in our mind. This can lead to a negative or angry state of mind.

The main point to be understood here is that when we see an appealing or attractive object, it causes the mind of attachment to arise, which then leads to agitation and distress in our mind. Of course, an attractive object does have certain qualities of beauty. But the mind of attachment, being a faulty state of mind, actually exaggerates the attractive qualities of the object, causing the mind to perceive the object as being extremely attractive and

beautiful. Thus, a strong longing and desire to possess the object develops in our mind. We don’t notice that happening, but that is what attachment does and that’s how the mind of desire develops.

This is also true when a mind of aversion exaggerates the natural defects or imperfections of an object. It goes to show that, depending on our state of mind, an object can appear to be extremely attractive or extremely repulsive, well beyond the reality of its natural attributes. Thus, how we perceive an object totally depends on our state of mind.

The crucial point to understand here is that the one and very same object can be perceived as being either extremely attractive and appealing or extremely unattractive or unappealing. To make that illustration even clearer, we can use an example from life. Depending on your state of mind, your partner may sometimes appear to be very appealing and you feel great affection towards them. At other times, due to faulty perceptions, that same person, who earlier appeared so attractive and appealing, can now appear to be quite annoying and unattractive. However, there has not been a drastic change in that object—in this case our partner or companion.

We are talking about how your partner or companion appeared in the morning, versus how they appear later in the afternoon. In the morning, they might seem quite appealing and attractive and you might feel quite affectionate towards them. Again, due to circumstances later in the afternoon, you might feel quite hostile towards them. In that situation, it is not as if your partner has drastically changed. If we were talking about the duration of a few years, then yes, it is natural for change to occur. But within a day, a few weeks or even a month, especially if they are quite young, no drastic changes occur to someone’s physical appearance. Yet, there is this fluctuation in how you perceive your partner.

There is a term for this in the Tibetan language *nam-tok* which is usually translated as discursive conceptual thoughts. The literal translation can also be ‘superstitions’— a mind which does not see things in their true light or in actual reality. A superstitious mind is a disturbed, conceptual state of mind that can cause a lot of anxiety, fear and doubts.

For example, when we have an overly superstitious mind, we imagine we see things in the dark when, in fact, there is nothing there. A superstitious mind starts to exaggerate things; this generates fears and so forth. This is an example of how, when we have an underlying basis of superstition or discursive conceptual thoughts in our mind, these unwanted and unfounded exaggerations occur.

Again, harking back to an earlier point, the conclusion is that, due to our habitual tendencies, we naturally seem to focus outwards on objects such as beautiful forms and sounds etc. By seeing them as being appealing, we pursue them. This is how we are misled. Rather than focusing outwardly, we could change our approach, and start to look within and try to identify the appealing inner qualities, such as an appealing state of mind. This would bring much more solace to our mind; a real sense of wellbeing within ourselves. It’s not something we may notice right away. Focusing inwardly and searching for the appealing inner qualities of our mind is not something we normally do. But if we really pay attention and investigate, then we will begin to notice the value of this approach.

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When we are completely consumed or overwhelmed by a mind of attachment and anger, inner turmoil results. The mind will constantly be in an agitated and unsettled state. Intense attachment and anger can even cause obvious distress. Our breathing becomes irregular or we may even find it hard to breathe. This is an obvious indication relating to the inner turmoil we are experiencing.

If we let this situation be and didn't do anything about changing it, then it would be quite hard to find a real sense of inner joy and happiness.

So, how do we go about changing our attitudes? How do we actually change our perception or familiarity with appealing sensual objects? The way to do that is by acknowledging that if we were to maintain or continue to focus on appealing objects which cause attachment to arise and unattractive objects which cause aversion to arise, then, for as long as we are completely obsessed with that, it will cause distress and turmoil in our mind. To overcome that situation, we can do the exact opposite, which is to choose objects which do not cause attachment to arise in our mind. We can familiarise the mind with focusing on objects which do not cause attachment to arise and, furthermore, focus on objects which do not cause aversion or anger to arise in the mind. The more we familiarise ourselves with objects which do not cause the afflictive states of mind to arise, the more tranquil and settled our mind becomes.

As I have presented in our earlier sessions, the best way to oppose attachment arising in our mind, in relation to a particular object towards which we have a strong attraction, is the meditation which focuses on the imperfections of the object. This serves as an antidote for overcoming attachment. When we focus on the natural imperfections of the object, then attachment—which is the exaggerated mind of seeing the object as being hundred percent appealing and attractive—is overcome. Thus, the attachment starts to diminish. Likewise, with anger. When we have strong anger towards an object, the best antidote to overcome that anger is to meditate on developing love or patience towards the object. These are the most effective meditations to overcome particular afflictive states of mind. When we are not affected by the afflictions, such as intense attachment and anger, then the mind is clear. When the mind is in a clear state, we can then better utilise our intelligence and wisdom to make better judgement.

What I'm trying to clarify and point out to you here (many of you would have already noticed this) is that by engaging in meditation practice, choosing an appropriate object and focusing inwardly, the mind naturally settles down and we experience an inner sense of calmness. Even though it may be temporary, we have an experience of a calmer and more tranquil state of mind. So, I'm attempting to explain, systematically and logically, how and why this occurs. By choosing an appropriate object which does not cause the afflictions to arise and focusing on it for a certain period of time, naturally, by virtue of not focusing on objects which cause either attachment, desire or anger to arise, the mind settles down. That is how it works. Recognising this connection will enable us to develop a general cautionary measure. In our everyday lives, when we come out of a meditation session, it will help us to develop a cautionary measure in our mind. When we see attractive objects and so forth and the mind of attachment and desire starts to arise, we will be able to identify them and say, 'ah, I need to be careful as this is the mind of attachment—the mind of anger arising here, which causes so much distress and turmoil; a

mind of attachment and anger which destroys any sense of tranquillity and peace within myself.' Over time, this countermeasure will naturally arise.

This reminds me of an earlier time when I was explaining these points. During the questions, there was a young lady who, having heard the description of the meditation, made a comment. She was quite a young lady and she said, 'I find this to be very true and effective.' Nevertheless, she confessed that she found it very difficult to overcome attachment to her friend. She was being very honest and relating her own experience. She said that by attempting to meditate in this way, she found it to be somewhat effective, but when it came to meditating on her friend being unattractive, she found that very difficult. She was expressing what in fact, most people find difficult. At the same time, she acknowledged how failing to meditate this way can cause distress to the mind.

The main point to summarise is that if we focus on an object which causes afflictions to arise, then it causes distress to the mind, which then becomes unhappy. If we were to reverse that situation and focus on an object which does not cause the afflictions to arise, then, in contrast, it will bring peace and happiness to the mind. That is what I am saying.

An object which does not cause the afflictions to arise is referred to as an appropriate meditation object. It is an 'inner object' as opposed to an external object. An inner object or a mental object is what we need to be focusing on in meditation. When we focus on an inner object which does not cause the afflictions to arise, then naturally the mind will start to settle down and become tranquil and calm. Then we experience a positive effect. During the meditation session, in order to maintain attention and focus on the object, we need to apply two mental tools—mindfulness and introspection. This is essential. But after we come out of the meditation practice and begin to interact with the external world, this may cause attachment and anger to arise once again. However, if we maintain a degree of mindfulness and introspection, this will help us to be more cautious and not react to the afflictions arising in our mind. At another course another young lady commented that, during meditation she feels a great sense of relief and her mind becomes tranquil. When she finishes the meditation, afflictions such as anger and attachment do arise, but by thinking about the faults of these afflictions, she said it really helps to reduce the intensity. Again, that was a very insightful remark.

I have also shared in the past some very significant advice by the great master Atisha. Atisha stated that 'our best friend is mindfulness and introspection'. Some have said they find this advice extremely useful. In fact, many find it to be the most essential and useful advice of their lives. Another lady confided in me during a course that she had been meditating for ten years, and yet this was the first time she had heard about the importance of mindfulness and introspection as specific tools to aid meditation. She found it extremely significant.

Having explained the benefits and the purpose of meditation, we can now spend some time in meditation. So please adopt a relaxed posture.

Again, going back to the start of the teaching—the motivation for doing the practice is really important. We need to have a really keen mind; a very strong wish to engage in the practice. As the teachings explain, whatever we do, whether positive or negative, is determined by our

mind. More specifically, it is the motivation or intention that determines our actions.

Another great master, Shantideva mentioned that when we wish to say something or engage in some physical activity, we should first check our state of mind. Furthermore, Shantideva said that if we have checked our mind and detected some anger or attachment there, then, temporarily, we should not enact our words or deeds. We should just remain idle for a while. Once our mind has settled down, then we can enact our words or actions.

So many people have found this to be extremely useful advice, and indeed, very true. If we want our words and deeds to be of some use or benefit for others, then they would fail to bring that benefit if they were acted upon out of either anger or attachment. Therefore, when the mind has settled down and when it is not influenced by intense attachment or anger, our words and actions will be most useful and beneficial for others. This again is tied in with our motivation. We must ensure we have a good motivation with regards to doing the practice. At best, in simple terms, we can generate the intention or motivation that 'may my practice serve as a means to benefit others in the best way and may it cause others happiness and joy and become a means to alleviate others' suffering'. That would be the most positive motivation to develop. I could, of course, elaborate on these points but we don't have the time to do it now.

If we can generate a positive motivation from the very beginning, before we engage in the practice of meditation, then our practice will, most likely, become meaningful and virtuous. By virtue of having a positive motivation, an underlying good intention, it will serve as the underlying basis for the practice. This will make the practice very significant. In fact, generating this positive motivation can be a practice in itself. We can just focus on the motivation and think 'may my time and energy now become only a means to benefit others and may it not be in any way a means to hurt and harm others'. Just focusing on that becomes really meaningful as a practice of meditation.

Next, in the actual practice, as we regularly do here, we choose an appropriate object. So, we choose to focus on our breath. For beginners, this is the most appropriate object to focus on. In order to maintain a complete focus on the breath, we make a decision. We intentionally decide that 'I will not follow my discursive disturbing states of mind'. The discursive disturbing states, conceptions or thoughts arise, either in relation to past memories, to distractions in the present moment or with speculation about the future. Past memories could be either of times when we engaged with objects of attachment which then caused attachment to arise or when we engaged with objects of anger which then caused anger to arise. These disturbing thoughts are what we refer to as discursive disturbing conceptions. Even in the present, we might start to focus on and think about certain objects, thus causing disturbing conceptions to arise. Or, we could be speculating about the future. In this way, by recognising that, we need to intentionally withdraw from all disturbing conceptions; to prevent our mind from entertaining any kind of discursive thoughts and just let it be. Then, we constantly remind ourselves to focus on the breath. By bringing our focus inward, we place our full attention and focus on the breath. So, that's what we will be engaged in for the next few minutes.

*[Meditation]*

While maintaining our focused mind, we can just change the object of our focus to the sound of the mantra being recited, which is the name of Buddha Shakyamuni. During the recitation, we try to maintain our focus on the sound. When the recitation subsides, we then try to maintain that inner awareness and focus for a few moments.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

That is sufficient for now.

If there are any questions, I can address one question.

*Question:* I have read in some teachings that this period of our time now is called the 'degenerate age', however during the Nyung Nye fasting retreat the practice mentions the 'fortunate eon'. So, I am wondering what this means?

*Answer:* A practice such as the Nyung Nye involves taking precepts and observing the precepts over the time of the practice. Then, on top of that, it involves engaging in various practices of enduring hardships and so forth. It is said to be an incredibly meritorious deed when it is based on a good motivation. The teachings mention that doing this practice now, in what is known as a degenerate time, is much more meritorious than doing it at a time when everything was much easier.

However, when we refer to a 'degenerate age' we need to understand its actual implication. It's not to be understood in a subjective way to the time itself; that there is something wrong with the times and external environment. Rather, it actually refers to individual beings. When, due to strong afflictions in the mind, the delusions are very strong and rampant, that, subjectively, becomes a degenerate time. It means that the beings at that particular time are very hard to subdue. It would be difficult for the afflictions to be overcome and subdued. So, this is a reference to what is referred to as 'degenerate times'. It's more to do with our inner state of mind rather than the time itself.

To give a more contemporary illustration, it's like in normal speech when we talk about good days or bad days. This is dependent on the individual talking. For someone who had everything go well, they would say, 'I had a good day'. That doesn't mean that it was a good day for everyone. But for that particular individual it was a good day. Whereas, when certain things go bad or wrong for that individual, they would say, 'it's a bad day today'. They are not referring to the actual day being bad or good.

To give another illustration, if there are two shopkeepers and one did good business that day, he would say, 'oh, it was a good day today!'. Whereas, the other shopkeeper nearby would say, 'oh, it was a bad day today!' if he hadn't had many customers. Yet both shopkeepers were referring to the same day.

So, this is something to understand in a contextual sense. We need to understand that this is what it means in reference to 'degenerate times' or 'bad times'.

Thank you very much. You all listened very well.

*Transcribed by Bernii Wright  
Edit 1 by Katherine Boland  
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Edited Version*

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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

14 March 2018

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As usual it would be good to engage in some meditation practice.

In our previous session we covered the specific instructions on the physical posture for meditation, as well as the importance of relying on mindfulness and introspection during the meditation session.

When our physical body is well, and also when our mind is healthy and well, then that is when we can assure others that we are well. So what really determines whether we are well or not, depends on our physical and mental wellness. That is something to take note of.

Indeed, when we take this a bit further, in relation to ourselves, we can see that our physical body and speech and what we refer to as our mind go along with us wherever we go. In other words, one's body, speech, and mind are actually inseparable from the individual self.

So, it is really important for us to understand this interrelationship between our body, speech and mind. Most importantly, we need to recognise the relationship between our body, mind and individual self.

As mentioned earlier, what determines whether one is well or not is really dependent on our physical state and on our mental state. When we are not well physically, that is when we would say, 'I am not well', and when our mind is not really happy, and we are not feeling too good psychologically, then again we would say 'I don't feel good, I am not well'.

This may seem somewhat simplistic, but actually there is really a lot to think about on this point. The main thing that we learn from this interdependent connection, is that in order to experience wellbeing, we need to take care of our physical body and we need to take care of our mind.

Thus, if we can ensure the wellbeing of our body and our mind, then that will definitely mean that we will have a good life, and a happy life. That is really the point. Otherwise what other factors could we consider causes for a happy life, or a good life? There are none!

We can definitely admire the resolve of someone who has taken care of their body and mind throughout their life. I know individuals in their nineties now, who are very well; physically and mentally they are very sound. They have related to me that when they were quite young, they already had a happy mind, and they confirmed that they did not get involved in things such as smoking or drinking. So they have taken good care of their physical health in that way, by avoiding harmful substances. And then in later years, by also maintaining a positive state of

mind, it can be clearly seen that in their ripe old age they are able to maintain their wellbeing.

I wonder if as you get older, because the attachment to one's body and physical appearance becomes less, whether that contributes to more mental ease and a sense of happiness in the mind. That is what I think.

One of the elderly persons I mentioned earlier is not a Buddhist practitioner, yet to have this good outcome seems to be testimony to having taken care of their body and their mind.

Of course, in relation to our physical body, there are certain illnesses that may come about naturally without being able to prevent them, but there are however many types of physical ailments which are clearly caused by not taking care of our health, such as by actually consuming certain things which are harmful and detrimental to our health.

These kinds of illnesses or diseases which are particularly caused by neglecting our health, can be avoided when we apply the right measures of taking care of our health, and by making sure that we avoid the things that are harmful. We need to adopt the things that are good for our health.

This is something that is within our hands, and we have the responsibility for ourselves, because otherwise if one's health is neglected, especially in one's youth, by not really thinking or caring much about it, and consuming all sorts of things which can be harmful, then it can come to a point where even the doctors are not really able to do much. One's health can deteriorate to the point where even medication can be hard to restore it. So therefore, it is really important to take measures right from the beginning

That relates to our physical wellbeing and how to care for it. Likewise with our mental wellbeing; there are certain things that we need to avoid because they can be detrimental to our mental wellbeing.

And further, we need to protect the positive qualities in our mind such as clarity; we have the potential to have a clear and a peaceful state of mind, so we need to apply the means to protect that, and this is where meditation practice comes in.

If we reflect on the consequences of not protecting our mind, what would they be? If we don't protect our mind, for example from afflictions such as anger or jealousy, then the consequences are that one's mind will definitely be in an agitated, disturbed and non-peaceful state. So therefore, if we protect our mind from anger and jealousy, then as a consequence we will experience a happy state of mind. This is true when we protect our mind from the various different types of afflictions.

Likewise, it would be good to reflect on the consequences of allowing our mind to follow various distractions. Are we happy when we are in a distracted state of mind? What kind of mind is it? Is it a peaceful or agitated state of mind? This is something worth reflecting on.

So, when we apply the appropriate measures to protect our mind from being influenced by afflictions, then the consequence is that the mind is protected from the afflictions and our mind is more settled.

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When we apply the technique of focusing on an inner object, what is known as the meditation object, then by the virtue of focusing on the inner object, and by not allowing the mind to follow after the distractions the mind feels much more tranquil and relaxed. During that time when the mind is focused on the inner object, so there is no immediate cause for the afflictions to arise.

When the afflictions are not manifested, and they subside, we experience natural tranquillity, natural calmness in the mind. So we apply this method of focusing on an inner object, initially for the duration of one minute, and then gradually increase it to two minutes. Initially it is better not to have a long session, just one or two minutes at a time. Then that one or two minutes of actual focus on the inner object can be applied more frequently during the day, up to one hundred times during the day, and if you can keep your mind focused on the inner object, then by the virtue of doing that, the mind will naturally experience much more tranquillity. This will definitely counteract the natural tendency or habit of the mind wandering off and following the distractions.

As mentioned earlier, when the mind is distracted, that causes agitation in the mind which leads to an unhappy state of mind. When we intentionally apply methods to reverse that, then the mind experiences more tranquillity and more happiness.

Through familiarity with focusing on an inner object it becomes more of a habit. Then even when we are out and engaged in our normal everyday life activities, that familiarity of focusing on an inner object from our earlier meditation session, will serve as an aid to enable us to become a bit more aware of what is going on in our mind, and whether our mind is becoming distracted and influenced by afflictions and so forth.

That awareness itself can be really very helpful to prevent distractions or afflictions from further escalating. For example when the mind of anger arises, it is normally in relation to an object. If it is in regard to an external object that we develop anger, then due to our earlier familiarity of the practice of meditation, we can come to a point where we take notice of anger as soon as it arises, and investigate anger itself, rather than focusing on the external object that served as a condition for anger to arise.

There is not much we can do to change the external object, as that is not within our control, but the mind of anger itself is something that we have more control of. Look at the mind of anger itself, investigate it and check its nature and the consequences of allowing anger to manifest within oneself. What would the consequences be? So this sort of investigation would really help to reduce the intensity of that anger.

Likewise, when attachment arises, rather than focusing on the object of the attachment, and trying to do something to change the object itself, looking at the attachment itself within our own mind is something more manageable; we can look at and investigate attachment itself.

Although we may not be able to completely avoid anger or attachment from arising in our mind, through this

process we can definitely help to reduce the intensity of anger and attachment. That particular intensity causes deep agitation and anguish within one's mind, and that can definitely be reduced, and this would be really, really helpful.

To use a more specific example, in an event where one gets angry or upset with one's partner or companion, if we can immediately just take notice of the anger that arises within oneself, and just spend some time looking at one's anger rather than focusing on one's partner or companion. If we first look at our own anger and take notice of it and acknowledge it, then when we look again at our partner or companion we would see them in different light. It will be different to how we initially perceived them in the moment of anger; there is definitely a change.

In talking about anger, we might all be agreeing and thinking that sounds reasonable. If one can have a better perspective of one's partner or companion without the mind of anger, then that will be a good thing and you probably all agree with that. But with attachment we might start thinking, 'oh but I don't know if I can do without having a mind of attachment to my partner or companion' because one immediately thinks that if one doesn't have attachment then one may feel that one will miss out on something in that relationship. But that is really a false way of thinking.

What I am suggesting here is to just look at your own state of mind and notice when there is intense attachment towards your partner, then compare that to the mind that has a bit less intense attachment. If that intense attachment towards your partner can be relieved or reduced a bit, a little bit more relaxed, I think that would be healthier and much better for you and your partner.

So the point here is that rather than intentionally enhancing your attachment to your partner or companion, it would be better to reduce the intensity of that attachment. The way to reflect on this point is that if the object of one's attachment is beyond change, i.e. that they will never change, then perhaps one could say there is nothing wrong with having attachment. But since the object will definitely go through changes, then for as long as the strong mind of attachment is present it is not possible to accept the changes because it is holding onto a particular projection of the object as being extremely beautiful. So when the object's appealing features start to fade away, it will cause so much agony in the mind.

Now of course, I personally don't have experience of that, but when I look at situations, and when people relate their troubles to me, it seems that a lot of pain and agony is experienced when changes take place. That is something that you can relate to.

Furthermore, when there is very strong attachment towards the partner, then this also seems to cause a very strong sense of possessiveness towards the other person. A very strong sense of possessiveness, actually causes a very tight hold on the other person which can be an uncomfortable experience. There are those who have mentioned to me that their partner is always checking on their every move and scrutinising whatever they do; it

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seems to be uncomfortable for the other person when there is too much possessiveness.

Therefore, when the mind of attachment is reduced, it can actually help the other person to feel more relaxed as well. So within that atmosphere of a more relaxed state, and a more relaxed relationship, then I feel there will be room for the genuine positive states of mind of love and compassion to be generated for each other. And when the relationship is based on true love and compassion, then that is a much healthier relationship. And when there is a mutual care for each other based on love and compassion, then that will definitely foster a genuine trust towards each other as well.

Now referring back to the main point, the practice of meditation is one where we train our mind to focus on objects which do not cause afflictions to arise. By familiarising our mind with those objects, we can then reduce the intensity of the afflictions in the mind, and consequently cause more tranquillity and calmness to arise in the mind.

As mentioned earlier, we think about the negative consequences of anger. We really use our own experience to investigate what are the consequences of anger, and contrast that to when one's mind is devoid of anger, when there is a mind of no anger. Likewise, when one has intense attachment, what kind of consequences does one experience with intense attachment? And in contrast to that, when one has non-attachment in one's mind, what does one experience? Likewise, with the mind of jealousy, what kind of agony does it bring to the mind? And then likewise if one is free from jealousy, focusing on an object of non-jealousy, then what are the positive consequences that one experiences?

So what I am presenting to you here, in very practical and simple terms, is really a means for checking on and investigating one's own state of mind, the emotions and feelings that one goes through, one can just check-up for oneself.

Now we will apply the meditation technique for a few minutes, and we remind ourselves that with meditation we need to have an object to focus on, a meditation object, and for our purpose here, as we regularly do, we use our own breath to focus on.

In order to apply this technique fully and properly, we need to make the commitment to not allow our mind to be disturbed in every direction, following various different distractions, but rather bring our focus inwards, and having brought our focus inwards then placing it on the meditation object.

The consequences of a completely dispersed and distracted mind is, that our mind loses its full potential, one lacks the potency of the mind when it is completely dispersed in every direction. Whereas when we bring our focus inwards and place it on one object, then the potency of the mind becomes much more effective. We can then utilise the potential or potency of the mind to a greater extent. So that is the virtue of bringing our focus inwards and placing it upon one object, as through that one gains a greater ability in one's mind, and the opportunity to use it in a proper way.

Further, as a way to maintain our focus on the object, one needs to apply mindfulness, and to be really mindful of the object, which is the breath itself. Constantly remember it, and while focusing on it, we also need to find the right measure, where our focus is not too intense or too tight but also not too loose.

The analogy mentioned in the teachings is that it is like holding a stick; if you hold it too tight that can be stressful and painful, whereas if it is too loose, then you will lose the stick - it will fall out of your hands. Similarly, if you are holding onto your fingers, when squeezing too tight, that is not comfortable, whereas you can hold your fingers and just squeeze to a certain degree so that you have a grip. It is something similar to that.

Of course, the right method will eventually come through experience, but this is what we try to bear in mind initially, not to be too tense and at the same time not to be too loose.

So now by maintaining a one hundred percent focus on the breath, we will spend a few minutes in meditation.

#### *Meditation*

We now change the object of our focus to the sound of the mantra to be recited, and maintain the focus inwards.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

That will be sufficient for now.

Does anyone have a question?

*Question:* Geshe-la, you mentioned earlier that we need to prepare for our old age, by taking care of our health and wellbeing now; however when we are young we don't normally think much about old age. Are there any methods to help us reflect on it more readily?

*Answer:* Of course, thoughts about one's old age and so forth may not come naturally if one doesn't consciously think about it. There is a saying by one of the earlier masters that; 'not thinking about the need to practice Dharma twenty years went by, then contemplating and thinking that perhaps I need to practice the Dharma, another twenty years had gone by. Yet another twenty years went by not finding the time to practice the Dharma, this then is the story of an empty life'. So it is similar to that.

Actually, the point that you raise is exactly what is coming later on in the text. The text itself will be giving actually points to think about.

Taking it on a personal level, when you were five years old for example, it would never have occurred to you that one day you would be twenty-five, but now you are twenty-five.

So the reality is, that whether we think about it or not, it actually does occur, our old age will come. It is not dependent on whether we think about it or not, it actually does come.

I guess the point really is that there is no specific strategy other than actually thinking about the reality of one's life, but that doesn't mean that one needs to become obsessed with thinking about one's old age. However it is practical to think about your life. For example, in a few years' time

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where you will be, what you will do and so forth. So these kinds of thoughts would be useful.

To give a little bit more explanation regarding the occurrences in our lives, for example when one reaches the age of seventy, then that is usually an age that you would call 'retirement'.

Having reached the age of seventy then suddenly one will be without a job, which means that there is no regular income. I have heard that then some people start thinking about their savings, like maybe one or two hundred thousand dollars, and how long that would that last, will it be enough up to their eighties or nineties? And then apparently some people at that stage start to worry again, and start to think, where will I get income from? How can I survive?

So it seems that if we have made plans when we were younger, like long-term investment for our old age, then perhaps you would not have to worry at that time. But also with health, in terms of one's health, if one doesn't take care of one's health, one can experience some consequences of that as well, that is something that we can all recognise.

Now leaving aside the consequences that one may have to face in our old age, some more immediate examples come to mind, such as when young people abuse their body through substances, injecting or consuming all sorts of substances, and then they reach the point where they become completely addicted, and this causes a lot of anger and conflict in the family. There are fights within the family, or with one's partner, and there is so much destruction and so much unhappiness that comes about because of that situation, that is something very obvious.

You do not have to wait until sometime in the future for those consequences, they are right there in one's youth, one experiences these consequences immediately.

So when we see examples of that, we need to protect ourselves by reminding ourselves to avoid going down that path. That is something we can learn.

And then there are those who in their later years, such as in their sixties, who confess that they didn't take care, and they neglected their bodies when they were young, and now they are experiencing a lot of complications with their health. A person who I knew passed away when he was barely sixty-eight but he looked much older.

From what I understand, although I am not one hundred percent sure if I understood everything correctly, he was saying that he neglected his health and his body when he was younger. He didn't seem to be too anxious however, he seemed to be in quite good spirits, but he was confessing that he may have had substance abuse issues and so forth when he was young, and that caused him ill-health.

I've also got some associates in their late sixties and they have mentioned to me that through having smoked a lot when they were young, they now have problems with their lungs, difficulty with breathing and so forth.

Apparently, the doctors can clearly see the effects with the body at that age, around sixty, with the effects of early substance abuse and so forth, and the difference

between someone who hasn't taken substances can be quite clearly seen, there can be significant differences.

I used to think that I was quite old when I was about twenty-five, and then when I first came to Australia I was about forty-eight and I thought I was quite old then, so I used to think; 'since I am forty-eight and quite old there is no point thinking of much more advancement, it's better to just focus on my practice and try to meditate. That will be the best thing to do'. So that is how I used to think, and I guess that might have helped a bit with my practice.

In terms of one's material achievements and conditions, it is perhaps good to have the thought of contentment and not to be too ambitious. That sort of mind can be helpful for practice.

Thanks very much for listening well.

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo  
Edit 1 by Robyn Ralton  
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Edited Version  
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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཕམ་ལུགས་ཀྱི་ལོ་ལྔ་པའི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་ལྟར་།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

21 March 2018

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In our last session we covered how to engage in the meditation practice, such as the posture and the manner of focusing on the meditation object.

One way to understand the purpose and need for meditation practice is to consider how our normal state of mind functions. If we are allowing our mind to follow every distracting thought and focus on objects that cause the afflictions to arise, resulting in negative states of mind, consequentially we will start to feel agitated and unsettled within our self and within our own mind. Upon further contemplation it is important to consider, particularly for the sake of our mental wellbeing, that if we don't contain our mind and we do nothing to change it from being completely distracted, we will then become a victim of constant agitation which will lead to greater mental angst and problems. The process of how to change this situation is to first of all acknowledge the fact that if one allows one's mind to become completely distracted, focusing on objects that cause negative states of mind to arise, the result will be further complications in our life and greater turmoil in our mind. Once this is acknowledged, we should adopt a different approach to change our state of mind and our attitudes. A reasonable question could then be posed, 'Is there a method or a means to change my way of thinking?'. The process of doing this internal investigation in the form of an internal dialogue of checking within oneself, is in itself a practice, which will help the mind to settle down.

Whenever we face difficulties or challenges in our life, it is reasonable to assess the situation in order to understand the nature of the problem. A practical way of dealing with it is to check whether there is a solution and then seek a method to overcome these inner problems and particular challenges. If there is a solution, we need not feel too anxious; we can feel more relaxed because the problem is solvable, and methods can be applied. However, if there is no immediate solution for a particular problem one is facing, then there is no point worrying about it or feeling anxious; it is best to accept the situation. This attitude or way of thinking is really helpful.

Problems or challenges are bound to arise at different times of our life. We have all experienced various difficulties and when one problem is solved, yet another arises! This is part of the nature of our existence. Since we cannot completely avoid or escape problems, it is worthwhile to check how best to deal with them. If we don't acknowledge our problems or we try to ignore them, then we will reach a point of becoming overwhelmed with a feeling of there being no hope.

Whereas, if we look into the situation and assess the problem properly, if it is solvable, there is no need to worry! We can acknowledge to ourselves that most of the inner turmoil we experience is due to allowing our mind to become completely distracted and focused outwardly in every direction. For as long as we focus mostly on sensual objects that cause agitation to arise, we will not be free from an agitated state of mind because the conditions are always present. Thus, having assessed whether or not there is a method of looking into the situation, and understanding how the mind becomes affected in that way, we will then be able to acknowledge that the situation can be reversed, and we can choose to focus within ourselves rather than allowing our mind to focus outwardly. When we place our focus on an appropriate inner object, by the virtue of being withdrawn from all the distracting external objects, the mind will naturally settle down and the agitation, the anxiety and the worries will begin to subside. This is specifically the meditation method or technique which we adopt.

Having specifically outlined how the meditation practice works as a way to bring about a more settled and calmer state of mind, we may engage in that practice in a more formal way. I feel it is important to emphasise that whenever we face problems or difficulties in our everyday life, if we have the right attitude we will not become overwhelmed, which is an important point to keep in mind as a way to not feel too discouraged. When problems or challenges arise, particularly when we are engaging in something worthwhile, it is not always going to be easy when we expend some effort. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has emphasised in his teachings that by willingly accepting certain problems and difficulties, knowing that it is for a good purpose, can help us to feel more encouraged. Far from being completely overwhelmed we will be able to take on these challenges, willingly. The moment we begin to accept a problem or a challenge, it is no longer a problem or a challenge. By using our ability to think rationally and to work out a solution, our intelligence and wisdom will be able to function more effectively and thus we will be better equipped to think straight in order to work out the solution. As soon as we experience a difficult or challenging problem, if we allow our mind to become completely overwhelmed and think, 'Oh it is too difficult', then that in itself can become a habit. If such habituation reaches a certain point, every difficulty and problem will seem overwhelming and we will not be able to face anything at all, which is an unfortunate state to be in. Besides the meditation practice helping us to maintain the integrity and inner strength within ourselves, even on a secular level by maintaining a positive and correct attitude, we can also endure physical challenges without the mind becoming weighed down, unhappy and overwhelmed. Some people are able to face great physical challenges with quite a strong mind which of course does not come about spontaneously and naturally; adopting a positive way of thinking and attitude requires some mental training.

Whatever worthwhile activity we engage in, there are bound to be some challenges and difficulties. If we adopt the right attitude by willingly accepting these challenges

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and difficulties, we will not become overwhelmed. There is a lot of stress particularly for those who are engaged in study, as it can be very difficult and challenging at times. If an individual were to readily give up pursuing their studies by thinking, 'oh this is too difficult' and they become easily overwhelmed, they will lose a great opportunity for future success. Whereas those who can accept and withstand the challenges, show resilience and are persistent, later on their life will be much better. There are many accounts of people who have persisted with their studies and after having finished, they have secured a good job. This is something even on a practical working level we can see has great benefit, and these are points to keep in mind.

Leading back to the problems that we face on a psychological level, those psychological challenges and difficulties are caused from none other than a disturbing conceptual state of mind which is an overactive mind, obsessed with a lot of different thoughts. When one is obsessed with so many different thoughts and excessive thinking it will result in mental turmoil but adopting a mental solution to apply a method will enable this overly conceptual state of mind to subside. Thus, the meditation practice is a most effective practice to help an overly thinking mind to subside. So, when we understand the essence of the meditation practice, it will then serve a great purpose.

We can now engage in the meditation practice. However, prior to doing so it is worthwhile to acknowledge that the disturbing conceptual thoughts or ideas that pop up in our mind or even specific thoughts we are able to notice, immediately cause distress in our mind. As according to the great Master Shantideva to make a resolution that, 'I will not allow my mind to follow these disturbing conceptual thoughts even for a second'. With that commitment in our heart when we engage in the meditation practice, our mind will be more alert and fresh and able to maintain a focus on the actual chosen object that we apply here in our meditation practice, which is our own breath. Based on our natural breathing we will bring our full attention and focus and make the commitment that, 'I will not allow my mind to follow other discursive conceptual thoughts that may arise. They may pop up, but I am not going to follow them'. After making this resolution, we bring our attention and focus onto the breath itself.

So, in that way for the next few minutes we can focus on our breath.

*(Pause for meditation)*

Are there any questions?

*Question:* Geshe-la, in one of the previous sessions, you mentioned that is much more worthwhile to focus on inner appealing objects. What is the appealing internal object that one should be focusing on?

*Answer:* To reiterate what I specifically mentioned two or three weeks ago about how we are so used to looking at external appealing objects that are distracting objects and we fail to notice the appealing objects within ourselves, specifically love and compassion. So, while failing to notice that we have something so appealing within

ourselves, we don't focus on it and therefore it doesn't appear to us as being appealing, so we keep looking outside and we become distracted by external objects.

Following the objects that appear to our sensual mind such as appealing forms, colours and shapes, will induce attachment or desire to those objects. In relation to our auditory sense factor, we are attracted to nice and appealing sounds which will then in turn cause our desire to arise towards those pleasant sounds. Likewise, with pleasant smells, tastes and tactile objects and feelings. When our mind becomes completely obsessed with these external appealing objects, attachment arises, and the mind becomes agitated by the attachment to or desire for these objects. Furthermore, unappealing objects appearing to the mind will cause aversion to arise. Experiencing attachment and aversion causes so much turmoil in our mind. Conversely, if we are able to focus inwardly and notice the appealing objects within ourselves, such as love and compassion, and develop them further, that will bring so much joy and happiness to our mind.

An illustration of how turmoil, angst and complications can arise if we were to allow our mind to further immerse itself in appealing objects of attachment is, for example, a committed relationship between married couples. If the husband starts to notice other attractive women and his mind follows that attraction, and if attachment develops and he starts a relationship with someone else, then there is no need to mention how the subsequent complications and difficulties will impact on the committed relationship with his wife. In this particular case, if the husband's mind had been trained to not become completely overwhelmed by attachment upon seeing other attractive individuals, he would not have acted on the attraction in the first place and the attachment would have therefore been negated and consequently, the complications and problems would have been minimised. This example shows how, with some training of our mind, even though desire and attachment still arise, we should be able to contain ourselves to not become overwhelmed by attachment - which would otherwise completely override our mind and impair our judgement. That is the main point.

Another noteworthy point I have mentioned in the past relates to when you are young and have the ability to go out and enjoy yourselves. You gain a certain amount of enjoyment and level of satisfaction, however if you allow yourself to become completely immersed in that, especially during your youth, then you will be continuously seeking pleasures and enjoyment. It seems to be apparent that in later years when someone reaches their seventies or eighties, their mind continues to seek pleasures and enjoyment because of the habituation of having spent their life in pursuit of them. Their mind still seeks them but physically, the person is no longer able to pursue them which will cause so much agony and difficulty in their mind. Such an individual may be well endowed with wealth and not deprived of the essential conditions for their needs, but when staying at home by themselves for example, they are totally unhappy, and their mind is in constant turmoil. Even with the good external conditions, their mind is in turmoil. This

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situation will come about if one does not take precautions to contain one's mind in the earlier stages of life, and the means to help the mind be contained and controlled is the practice of meditation.

It has been confided to me, particularly by the elderly, that meditation practice is really helpful and beneficial to their lives. The effectiveness and value of the meditation seems to be more readily accepted and understood by the elderly. Some have confessed to me that, 'I wish I had known about this technique earlier in my life. I only started understanding it and came into contact with meditation when I was sixty plus in age, and that seems to have been too late for me!'. The reason why they see particular value in the meditation practice at that age is because they have considerable experience of immersing themselves in enjoyment and pleasures and they have now come to a point where they realise all of that has been quite futile and the main source of gaining some mental tranquillity and happiness is through the meditation practice. This is what they experience! Having said that, it is also a fact that during our younger years, it is harder to recognise and understand the real value of meditation. One may assume the values of meditation and notice some benefit, but actually the real benefit may yet to be understood and experienced. So, it is good at a younger age to learn from the examples of the elderly, and what they express through their own experiences as it being something of value. Particularly those who suffer illness have commented about the power of the meditation practice and how it has become a valuable aid which brings solace to their mind. They have confided about not having seen much value in meditation when they were well and healthy, but after experiencing ill health it has become apparent that the real solace for their mind is the meditation practice. So, I regularly emphasise that our best friend and companion is our happy and positive state of mind which can help us at all times.

The emphasis here is on recognising that a positive mind, which encompasses a kind and happy mind, is the most valuable asset we can ever have. We must make every attempt to retain our happy state of mind and not allow it to decline, because once it declines and the happy state is lost, we can reach a point where it is very hard to restore the positiveness in our mind. So, the way to achieve and maintain a happy mind is through focusing on virtuous objects to have a virtuous mind. We need to understand this connection – adopting a virtuous mind and acquainting ourselves and focusing on virtuous objects is how we attain a happy mind.

In saying that one needs to maintain a positive state of mind, is in contrast to the negative states such as anger and jealousy. As I have shared in the past, in my early days I trained my mind to combat the negative states of anger and so forth, and I can now safely say that it is several years since I have been affected by intense anger or a mind of jealousy. As a way to protect myself from the minds of intense anger and jealousy I apply cautionary measures and conduct a dialogue with myself saying, 'oh be careful, anger is arising here'. Then I call my own name and say, 'you must be careful here because giving in to the anger will only cause you distress and make your life miserable and it will be much worse for

you'. Likewise, I caution myself when jealousy arises. When anger arises in your mind, this tactic involves looking at the anger itself rather than focusing on the object that has provoked the anger, and understanding the nature, disadvantages and faults of the anger. By observing and then investigating such negative states of mind in this way, whether they be negative emotions or afflictions, can help to appease our mind so that we do not become consumed by them. Although this method can help to the extent of enabling intense moments of emotion to subside, it does not serve to completely uproot the negative state of mind. However, we will still reap great benefit from having momentarily overcome an intense negative state.

Before we conclude the session for the evening, let us again spend a few minutes in meditation focusing on the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is the name of Buddha Shakyamuni. While the name is being recited, we maintain our focus just on that sound and when the recitation subsides, we maintain the inner focus just for a few moments which will itself, be a good meditation.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor  
Edit 1 by Bernii Wright  
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Edited Version  
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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

28 March 2018

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As usual we begin with meditation.

What is meditation? It is familiarising our mind with positive thinking. Through engaging in this training we will be able to slowly discipline our mind and become more peaceful.

We need to train our mind to think in a positive way because positive mental patterns are not natural. Through training, it is possible to fully control our mind so that a positive way of thinking becomes more natural. With training, when we experience any form of discomfort or unhappiness we will notice that the cause is within and not outside of ourselves. We will be able to identify the real cause within. We will see that whenever a positive state of mind arises we experience happiness and peace, whereas when a negative state of mind arises we experience unhappiness and discomfort.

As we focus our attention inward, particularly to our mind, we notice how our mind is out of our control and always wandering after external objects. Because of these wanderings we continuously allow these conceptual or disturbing thoughts to build inside. These fill our mind with hopes, fears, dissatisfactions and frustrations. If we have a stream of water which flows in all directions, the current won't be strong. Similarly, because our mind is so scattered it is very weak and we don't have any capacity for directed thinking. If we were able to bring the mind inward and fully under our control, we would feel more hope and courage within ourselves. It is important to recognise the disadvantages of not having a controlled or a disciplined mind.

The purpose of the meditation is to bring the mind inward because, when the mind is always focussed outward and we step back, we notice many shortcomings. Meditation practice is something that we engage in daily, where we bring the mind to an internal object and in this way feel the stillness of the mind.

The meditation we engage in is to simply focus on the breathing – on inhaling and exhaling. Even though the technique itself is very simple, it will have the immediate effect of bringing peace within. When we find it difficult when our mental focus is scattered and we feel restless, for example when our mind is completely filled with hatred or anger. Someone may even give you many different ways of thinking – different logic or a different perspective on how to calm your mind. Sometimes it's very difficult. If we engage in the simple meditation of focusing on breathing we will know that the moment we bring the mind onto the breath, all of the restless thoughts immediately calm down and the mind seems to begin to relax.

As you have already heard about the features of the sitting posture, there is no need to go through that. Adopt the sitting posture which is most comfortable, and we will begin this meditation. With a relaxed and comfortable sitting posture, try to bring the mind inward by letting go of all thoughts. Whether those thoughts are positive or negative, wholesome or unwholesome, we are trying to empty the mind of all thoughts and let it sit inside. Having emptied all thoughts and turned the mind inward, there will be a point just before the mind starts to wander off, when one needs to remember to direct the mind to focus on the breathing. As much as possible try to keep the mind on the breath for the next few minutes.

[Meditation]

Thank you.

Initially it is better to limit the duration of the meditation to as short a session as possible, because having a really focused meditation is more important than how long you are able to sit in the meditation posture. Even if the meditation practice lasts only for one minute, and in that one minute you have applied the tools of the meditation well, and have achieved some settling of the mind, you have succeeded in the aims of meditation and have achieved something stable that you can build on.

Start with one minute until you are able to maintain the same settling of the mind for that period of time. Only then should you increase the time. If the mind wanders it is better to break the meditation and then start it again later. If you force yourself to sit there for a long time, there is a danger that you will build a bad habit of mental wandering into your meditation practice.

If you engage in meditation for a long time, but throughout the whole meditation period there is no stability or no stillness of the mind, then there is no point and you are not achieving the actual purpose of the meditation, which is to control the mind and bring stillness within. Meditation is not just about the physical discipline of sitting in a specific posture. It's not going to help very much, even if you sit in that way for a long time.

The way we should train our mind is to focus on the effectiveness or quality of the meditation practice. Even though it's a very short period, if you repeat the same short period over a day or a month or a year, then eventually it is possible to naturally sit with a focussed mind for the duration of an hour. It is important to *enjoy* the meditation practice as well.

Normally it is advised to stop the meditation practice when you feel like you want to do a bit more. If you stop then, you will be more motivated to do this practice again, but if you stop at the point where you are fed up with the meditation practice, then later when you think of meditation, you will have no motivation and you will probably hate meditation practice! It's very much like if you have someone who is close to you, and you are separated at a time when you both very much like each other, then when you see the same person again after some time, you will be very excited to see them. If you separate from a person at a time when there are some tensions, you won't be excited to see this person again.

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Another very important purpose of meditation is to free ourselves from the dominance of mental afflictions. As long as you remain under the control of mental afflictions there is no freedom, even to choose your actions. You are forced to do some actions which are against your own interest, against your own wishes and your own intention. For example, there are some who have the problem of controlling their aggression. This can be to the extent of committing murder. Rather than getting angry at these people, there's a good reason to feel empathy towards them. It may be even possible that they are aware of their actions but cannot control their aggressive nature. They may be aware and very much want to be rid of it. For example, from our own experience we know that when we are empowered by anger we lose the freedom to choose our actions. When there is no clarity in the mind it is very likely that our actions will also be destructive. Therefore, we have to remind ourselves that meditation practice is about how to gain freedom from the power of mental afflictions. In a way, when we engage in meditation practice we are battling with these mental afflictions. The outcome of the meditation is when there is weakening or decreasing of mental afflictions. This is a good sign of the effectiveness of our meditation practice. Lama Tsong Khapa also mentioned that the sign of good spiritual practice is the diminishing of mental afflictions.

I am also trying to show to you how to bring about happiness and joy through meditation practice. Opposed to happiness and joy, there is misery and suffering. When we look at the cause of our suffering and restlessness, it is none other than the influence of the mental afflictions and our mind falling under the control of these mental afflictions. When we fall under the control of anger, pride or competitiveness and we are under the dominance of such mental afflictions, it is impossible for us to experience any happiness. If through meditation practice one is able to totally eliminate the mental afflictions, make them weaker or prevent them arising, one can immediately feel the difference in terms of finding more clarity, more stillness and happiness within oneself.

I also normally tell people that meditation is also a form of education - educating oneself about one's own mind! This, of course, is not only knowing how to practise meditation, but actually applying the practice, knowing first of all what meditation is.

As we said here, it is training our mind to a positive way of thinking and understanding that it is possible to control the mind with training. So in this way, if you are familiar with meditation practice and have gained some sort of conviction, when you are in a situation where someone is very annoying and you are boiling with hatred and anger and you continuously think of that person then you are feeding your own anger, and the outcome will be more restlessness and misery for yourself. If you immediately realise you are going through something unwanted and the main cause for this is because your mind is occupied or involved with that person, then rather than directing your mind to the anger, look at the nature of the anger and try to think, 'Are there benefits for me from having that anger or not?'. You need to reflect upon this and on the possible outcome if you

don't manage it. In any case, every time you think about that other person, if you focus on your own nature and on the anger itself, it will have the effect of actually lessening the anger. The reason you are able to lessen or prevent anger is because you have shifted the object of your mind from external to internal objects. Some say that you feel agitated if they try to direct their mind. They find that instead of benefiting, it makes the mind more agitated. If that is the situation, it is more beneficial to apply breathing meditation to first calm the mind.

We will stop here and chant the Buddha's mantra. Make sure you feel comfortable in your sitting posture. In this meditation where we also chant the mantra of the Buddha, the object we should be focussing our mind on is the sound of the mantra. As we chant the mantra we try to keep the mind on the sound of the mantra. At the point where we stop the chanting, we try to rest the mind inward.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

Thank you everyone!

*Transcribed by Bernii Wright  
Edit 1 by Carla Betros  
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Edited Version*

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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཕམ་ལུགས་ཀྱི་ལོ་ལྔ་པའི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་ལྟར་བཤམ་པའི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་ལྟར་།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

4 April 2018

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As usual it would be good to first spend some time discussing meditation.

If you are sitting doing meditation, then it is natural for us to talk about it.

As I usually explain, a good way to understand the meaning of meditation is that it is to familiarise one's mind with positiveness. And since the practice itself involves familiarising one's mind with positiveness, then it is worthwhile to contemplate, to look within, and to see what particular state of mind the positiveness here refers to. So it is worthwhile to investigate what a positive state of mind is.

Also specific to the meditation practice is choosing a virtuous or positive object to focus on, and to familiarise one's mind with, and to intentionally keep one's focus on that object. So this understanding is something really useful in order for one to develop a positive practice.

The benefits of engaging in meditation practice, through familiarising oneself with a virtuous or wholesome object, and more specifically a virtuous and wholesome mind, again and again, one starts to really establish a basis for a true sense of wellbeing and happiness within oneself.

In contrast to that however, it may be the case that we are actually more familiar with focusing on objects that cause us distress, namely afflictive external objects, and also afflicted states of mind. And if we allow our mind to be influenced by the afflicted states of mind then that will cause us distress and turmoil.

So there is an immediate positive effect that one can experience when one focuses and familiarises one's mind with a virtuous object. In the moment that we really allow our mind to settle down and focus on the virtuous object, a disturbed mind will naturally settle down, and that is an immediate positive benefit for us.

these are really important points to consider and to think deeply about, because we are so prone to being disturbed by internal or external conditions. With the slightest imbalance either externally or internally, we immediately get affected and we experience the consequences of a disturbed state of mind – we experience unease in our body or mind.

As the great Indian master Shantideva has mentioned, when the body is disturbed by illness, then that is when the body feels unwell and physical unease is experienced. Likewise, when the mind is disturbed by the afflictions, then one experiences unease in the mind, or an unwell mind. So these are important points to reflect upon as a

way to reverse that situation, and to protect one's body and mind.

As beginners, this is something we can easily relate to. It is not something too profound for one to be able to understand and to put into practice. The main point here is that when we adopt this very simple method, the practice of meditation, it can really help to settle our mind down which otherwise would be disturbed and agitated.

If we allow the mind to be in a disturbed state and agitated state for a long time, then the situation can get worse and worse to the point where one starts to really feel weighed down, and we feel despondent. We even could start feeling a sense of depression. There is a lot of talk about depression, and depression is something that can occur when the mind becomes completely overwhelmed by discursive thoughts. Conversely, having a clear, bright and a focused mind will help us.

It is important to really pay attention to these points as a means to avert and overcome a mind disturbed by afflictions.

Some people may feel that they are not really affected by any difficult situations, and that everything is fine, and so they may feel that they do not need to think about this practice of meditation so much. However, while that may be the situation at present, one never knows when the time may come where one begins to experience the effects of a disturbed mind. When conditions are generally okay, then that is when one feels a sense of wellbeing and ease, but as soon as conditions or circumstances change, then that is when the real test comes, and the vulnerability of one's state of mind is put to the test.

If, when circumstances change, and things are not going so well, and one experiences turmoil and a disturbed state of mind, one does not have the means to pacify one's mind, then that is where a situation can get really bad for oneself.

Really, the main point is that one needs to be extra vigilant, extra careful and cautious, when one meets with certain conditions that cause turmoil. It is possible that we may come into contact with good conditions, but sometimes bad conditions or circumstances also occur. If one is prepared, one will be able to withstand whatever changes come about externally, and be more likely to maintain a steady undisturbed state of mind. That is important.

Therefore, if you actually take up this practice of meditation and really try to apply it sincerely in your life, then, due to that familiarity, when difficult situations or external problems arise, you will really be able to maintain control, and not allow the circumstances to completely unbalance you. This is something that I have explained previously many times. I cannot over emphasise that we need to really prepare ourselves so we can accept the challenges and difficulties when they arise.

We are bound to experience certain conditions that are challenging. It could be external conditions or internal conditions, and in fact the main source of turmoil and difficulties are actually dependent on inner conditions. When we are affected by worry or anxiety and so forth,

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then if we don't really manage it well, we can feel disturbed. So really the best way to prepare oneself, and to protect oneself, is through the familiarisation of the meditation practice. That is something we need to bear in mind.

When we engage in this practice we can also really cultivate a discriminative wisdom, which is a deep inner intelligence that recognises what is pleasurable for oneself and what is harmful.

Now we will spend some time in the actual practice of formal meditation, and for that purpose we will adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture.

In order to engage in meditation practice it is important that we first identify and choose an appropriate object to focus on, and this is an object that does not cause afflictions to arise in our mind. We focus on an object in order to anchor our mind so that it does not get dispersed in all directions. Some people may prefer a particular object to focus on; while there are many appropriate objects to focus on, certain objects may be more suitable for one's mind and so for that reason one may choose to focus on a particular object.

However, the object that we regularly choose here as a common object to focus on is our own breath.

Choosing the breath is very significant for us beginners because, as the great master Lama Tsongkhapa has mentioned, for someone who is affected by a lot of discursive thoughts, focusing on the breath is the most appropriate and the most suitable object to focus on as a way to settle the mind

The reason why we need to apply an appropriate method to settle down the discursive thoughts is because the discursive thoughts are one of the main causes of interference whenever we wish do something. It is the discursive thoughts that affect the thinking in our mind and cause hindrance and interference. So that is why we need to settle that down.

So for an individual who is affected by a lot of discursive thoughts, or put simply, excessive thinking, engaging in a meditation technique that involves further analysis or thinking will not work. It will not be suitable, because their mind is already affected by excessive thinking.

For example, when someone is really affected by intense anger, if you ask them to meditate on love as a way to overcome anger, in that very moment when they are experiencing intense anger they will not consider that as being suitable for them. They will not take that on board, as meditating on love is not something that they can relate to right then.

However, a simple meditation of just focusing on the breath is something much more manageable because it involves a less strenuous state of mind. In fact, when one focusses on the breath properly and attentively, is said to enable the mind to settle down. The discursive thoughts and the very hyperactive state of mind will naturally settle down. Consequently, the mind becomes clearer and brighter and when the mind experiences this very clear and bright state, it actually also experiences a sense of deep relaxation, deep relief and a genuine sense of relaxation.

In regard to the specific instruction of how to focus on the breath, is said that the breath itself needs to be in a natural state. That means it has to be free from a deep inhalation and exhalation that is audible, and also be free from forceful inhalation and exhalation, such as a long in-breath or a long out-breath in a forceful manner. So in brief, the instruction is to maintain one's breath in its natural rhythm, just in the way that one would normally breathe, calmly and naturally.

Also, when one actually begins to focus on the breath, one of course applies mindfulness, an awareness that the breath is coming in and the breath is going out. Just maintaining that awareness, even just focusing on the breath itself coming in and going out is actually a very effective means to maintain one's focus.

So we adopt our appropriate physical posture, such as being relaxed but upright and straight. Then, most importantly, we need to have the right state of mind, which, for the meditation purpose, is to withdraw our attention from all forms of distractions whether internal or external. This includes not only the distractions which we would call negative distractions, but also the positive thoughts and so forth; temporarily we need to withdraw from those as well. The main point is to try to disengage from all mental activities, thoughts, mental processes and so forth, and just bring our full focus and attention onto the meditation object which is our own breath, completely focus on our own breath.

Initially, as beginners, we may find it hard to maintain a focus on the breath for a long duration, and actually the advice is that one should not attempt to focus on the object for a long time when the object may not be clear and steady. It is far better to have a good focus for a minute or two initially, and then take a small break, and then readjust the focus again, and in this way really focus single-pointedly for a minute or two. Then we can gradually increase the span of our focus, and our attention on the object, and it will actually become stronger, and steadier for a longer duration.

Otherwise if we begin our meditation by allowing our mind to be seemingly focused but actually distracted, like that, then that in itself can become a bad habit. Although we seem to be in a meditative state, the mind is actually always half distracted and half wandering, and that will be very difficult habit to change later.

If we can make sure that we are adopting a proper technique, from the very outset, in that we really focus on the object itself even for a short period, and we experience the positive effect of a focused mind, we will naturally be keen to continue to practise meditation.

Otherwise, as just mentioned, if we make an attempt to meditate but allow the mind to be completely distracted, then after a certain time we will become weary of that. Meditation will start becoming difficult. And because it seems that you are not making any progress, you may think that there is no point in meditating and that you may as well give up. That is the fault of not having utilised the technique properly. So it is important to have this clear understanding right at the start of our meditation.

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So now by setting our mind to the purpose of our meditation, we will try to maintain a one hundred percent focus on the breath itself and engage in this meditation for the next few minutes.

*(Pause for Meditation)*

Now while maintaining our posture and focused state of mind, we can change the object of our focus to the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is the name of Buddha Shakyamuni. After the recitation finishes, we can just maintain that focus and awareness.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

So that is sufficient for now. If there is a question I can maybe address one question, and it is fine if there is no questions.

Again, just to reiterate, it is important to find ways and means to associate with positive states of mind. If we can associate with positiveness every single day, and not allow our minds to be separated from that, then that will be the best assistant in whatever we do.

Within the positive states of mind, the most essential is the mind of love and compassion. This is the most positive state of mind that one can cultivate. A true sense of love and compassion is really essential for one's wellbeing and for the wellbeing for others. So if, in our daily life, we can really familiarise our mind with the values of love and compassion, and try to really integrate love and compassion into our normal way of thinking, then that will be most effective.

One aspect of the incredible effectiveness of love and compassion on a personal level is that if one extends true love and compassion towards others, it actually helps to overcome a lot of negative states of mind within oneself. So the afflictive states of mind that cause us distress and unhappiness, can mostly be overcome by love and compassion. It would be wonderful if one did not have to experience the ill effects of the negative states of mind; how wonderful it would be if these states of mind can be overcome by love and compassion.

So the more we familiarise ourselves with love and compassion, the more we will naturally be imbued with a sense of love and compassion towards others. And further, the more we familiarise ourselves with love and compassion, the more our mind naturally becomes more and more relaxed, and more joyful and happy.

These positive effects are something that we all can experience. When we have a true sense of love and compassion towards someone, we don't in that moment experience anger towards them, and we don't experience jealousy towards them, or a sense of competitiveness or pride.

Therefore, it is very clear, that when one's mind is dominated with love and compassion these negative states of mind that causes distress do not arise.

The main consideration for parents who have a true sense of love and compassion towards their children, will be the wellbeing of their children, and from the parent's side, they will only be thinking of how to benefit their children, and how to contribute towards the betterment

of their children, rather than having a sense of anger or pride or jealousy towards them.

Likewise, when there is a mutual sense of love and compassion in a relationship with partners or companions, there is a true bond, and a real sense of harmony between those two people.

So in this way we can see that love and compassion is really the main cause for a sense of genuine happiness for wellbeing. This is something that I don't say lightly. I have spent a lot of time, in fact most of my life, really just investigating and thinking about this point. And having some level of experience myself, I can definitely assert that love and compassion is the most valuable state of mind. And furthermore, it is not something which is completely alien to us, we all have the seed or the basis of love and compassion within ourselves. It is just a matter of further developing it and perfecting it, and that is what we need to do.

If we investigate about it further, we will come to acknowledge that whenever we face some sort of problem or difficulty in life, particularly one that it is hard to deal with by ourselves, then it becomes apparent that we have to rely on help from someone else. So we would naturally seek help from someone who has a true sense of love and compassion for us. That would be the person who would come to our aid, not just anyone.

So this is how we can again validate that the value of love and compassion. As I stress regularly, in any relationship the most important element is a true sense of love and compassion towards each other. Of course, that is not to say that a relationship may not initially be based on attachment, as it is hard to be completely free from attachment in a committed relationship. However, if both sides can work towards going further than just feeling attachment towards each other and go beyond that to developing a true sense of love and compassion, then that will really establish a genuine bond between two people.

Otherwise, if it is just based on a sort of fleeting attraction and attachment, (and I couldn't say that there is no enjoyment and happiness at all in that kind of relationship) it is definitely not be durable. When the attraction starts to wane, then the relationship will also fall apart, That is quite obvious.

However, those relationships that continue on are those which are based on a true sense of mutual love and compassion. Love is the sentiment of wishing others to be happy.

When we see they are lacking happiness, we are not able to bear that, and we wish them to be happy, that is the sentiment of love. Whereas compassion is the sentiment of not wanting others to experience any kind of suffering. When one sees others experiencing misery or suffering or pain, one is not being able to bear that, and wishes them to be free from that, and does whatever possible to help them to be free from the misery or pain. That is the element of compassion.

These are important elements that we needs to further develop and cultivate as a means to maintain that true sense of wellbeing within ourselves and for others.

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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

11 April 2018

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Please adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture. As we are an assembly of good friends and like-minded people with warm feelings for each other, this gathering becomes very meaningful.

For ordinary beings, one of the main sources of happiness comes from harmonious relationships with others. Benefitting sentient beings in every way possible, having a genuine concern for others and an intention not to harm anyone really is the main source of happiness we can experience in our life. If we can foster a mutual understanding with others, then our life will be meaningful and happy. This is entirely possible. It is not out of our reach and is something we can definitely manage to do. The ability to interact in a meaningful way comes from studying and training in the Buddhistharma. I would say that the root of peace and happiness comes from a genuine intention to benefit others.

This is something we can see when a nation has a genuine intention of benefiting society. In such a society there is much less conflict and much more peace. When there is a wish to benefit others, there is a natural inclination to help others. When we help each other, it brings about close relationships and peaceful coexistence. Thus, we can conclude that what we call 'world peace' is really dependent on individual people having an attitude of benefiting each other.

On a global level, peace is dependent on people mutually benefiting each other and, on a personal level, it is exactly the same situation. If we want to experience a peaceful feeling within ourselves, then it needs to come from a genuine intention of wanting to benefit and help others. What really brings a sense of happiness is a peaceful feeling within. It is not dependent on the kind of clothes we wear. Even if we have nice clothes, if we aren't at peace, then we will not be happy. Likewise, with food. We may have delicious food to eat but that does not bring about happiness in our mind if we lack peace in our heart. Therefore, what really contributes to happiness is a peaceful feeling within ourselves. Regardless of the external situation, even if we have poor conditions—poor clothing, poor food and so forth, when we feel peace within, we can still maintain a happy attitude. If we lack that feeling, the opposite is true.

We all long for inner peace. Since this is the case, it makes sense to look into how we might cultivate a peaceful feeling and find a way to bring more peace to our mind. We really need to understand that a peaceful state of mind does not depend on external conditions. Some people don't seem to get this point. They don't seem to

understand that peace is dependent on internal conditions rather than external conditions.

If we fail to recognise and understand the actual conditions that bring peace to our mind and habitually think that the conditions for peace and happiness lie outside ourselves then, for as long as we hold that attitude, we will lose our peace and sense of happiness whenever we lose our good external conditions. It may appear that when we lose those conditions, we lose our sense of happiness as well. But that is because we are looking at it the wrong way. If we have a proper understanding of what the actual conditions for peace and happiness are, then regardless of what is happening externally, our mind will not be disturbed. We will maintain the peace and happiness within our mind because we have recognised its real source.

So, based on our recognition of the internal conditions for peace and happiness, we can go ahead and cultivate them. The ability to do this is dependent on gaining an understanding through study and mind training. Then, when the external conditions change, we can maintain a more balanced state of mind.

A close associate of mine was going through a difficult period due to a separation. Despite having separated from her partner, she seemed to be able to maintain a balanced state of mind and she was not too distraught. She said, 'Geshe-la, as you emphasised, the real source of happiness is within, not without.' She was constantly reminding herself of that fact and it really helped her deal with the situation. Of course, occasionally she found herself getting upset because she missed being in the relationship. But she didn't become overwhelmed by sorrow or anger. She even said that her previous partner was a good person. So, the ability to have that state of mind and not hold anything against the other is a true sign of inner strength. There are many such instances I could relate but this example definitely shows the validity of holding that attitude.

Training the mind in a proper way definitely benefits the individual. Because she did not lose the peaceful feeling within herself, she was able to assert that her ex-partner was a good person. She could see his good qualities rather than being resentful. If she had lost the sense of peace within herself, then, whenever she talked or thought about her ex-partner, she would have been very upset and angry. She would have had only bad things to say about him. The ability to see the goodness in others comes from not having lost our peaceful state of mind. This is the point. If we can cultivate a peaceful feeling within ourselves, it helps our mind to see the positive qualities in others. So, even in the event of being separated from one's partner, one will be able to maintain a positive view of them.

If we have a peaceful feeling within, it will help us to develop discriminative wisdom. Discriminative wisdom means the deep intelligence of being able to differentiate between what is positive and what is negative. The mind-training I was referring to earlier, is what we call meditation. It is through meditation practice that we can gain a genuine sense of strength in our mind. Meditation practice contributes to and protects the peace and

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happiness within our mind. For this reason, I regularly mention its benefits. Some of you may have heard me mention meditation practice again and again and you may have even lost a sense of its practical benefits.

When some people first hear about meditation practice, they really relate to it. But if they don't practice and begin to realise the benefits, then, when they hear about it again and again, they will think... oh yes, I've heard that all before. They stop relating to it and applying it to themselves because they did not put it into practice. When someone actually practises meditation, hearing about it again and again only reinforces the idea that it is not only acceptable but also helpful for the mind. For someone who has not put meditation into practice, hearing about it again and again might put them off.

What we need to understand is that meditation practice is a technique to control our mind. Controlling our mind means not allowing it to be under the control of the afflictions. We also need to understand the negative consequences of allowing our mind to be under the control of the afflictions. If we allow our mind to be dominated by negativity, does that contribute to the peace in our mind or not? This is something we need to investigate.

To give a particular illustration—we naturally have a very strong sense of 'me', a strong clinging or grasping to the 'I'. Based on that strong grasping to the 'I', when one encounters unfavourable or unappealing objects, aversion and anger arises. By the same token, when one encounters favourable conditions and appealing objects, attachment and desire arise. Furthermore, other afflictions, such as jealousy, pride and competitiveness arise towards others. If we were to do an honest internal investigation and check our state of mind, then when anger or attachment arise in our mind, we can recognise how influenced we become by these afflictions and how our mind becomes agitated and is not in a peaceful state.

This complete focus just on one's own interest is called the self-cherishing mind. The stronger our self-cherishing, the more prone we are to afflictions such as anger, attachment, desire, jealousy, pride and so forth. The self-cherishing mind actually produces these afflictions and, as it grows stronger, the afflictions increase and intensify causing a lot of turmoil in our mind. When our mind is dominated by the afflictions, there is no chance for us to experience real peace and we lack the basis for a happy and meaningful life. This is something which becomes quite obvious. In contrast, a mind which thinks about benefiting others is full of love and compassion. We become patient and generous; the exact opposite to anger and jealousy. When we have these positive attributes in our mind, we begin to experience a genuine sense of peace and happiness within ourselves. When we have a peaceful and happy state of mind, then naturally we will have a meaningful and happy life. Someone may have an abundance of material wealth and so forth but if they lack a genuine sense of happiness and peace within, then they are not really enjoying their life.

I can use myself as an example of this. I don't have an abundance of wealth. However, based on the mind training and study I did in the earlier part of my life, I can

safely claim that now I have quite a peaceful and happy state of mind; a real sense of joy. I often have great gratitude in my mind and think that my life is very happy. I really don't have any complaints in my life now to speak of. This is attributed to my earlier training. The training and study I embarked on when I was quite young, seems to have been worthwhile. I have not gone astray or wasted my time on some sort of meaningless pursuit. While experiencing a true sense of wellbeing and happiness within, I am now able to share with others the results I reaped from my earlier studies in my life.

From my own experience, I can assure you that if you study and train your mind now, you will definitely reap a good result. I endured many hardships in order to continue my training and studies. I went through a lot of physical hardships in the early part of my life. However, many of the challenges I went through actually helped me to develop perseverance. I have reached a point where I can confidently say those hardships were of benefit. Therefore, based on my experience, I try to share and emphasise the point about the importance of maintaining the internal conditions for happiness. I could share many more stories, but we lack time now, so I won't go into them. Again, the main point is that we need to really think about the importance of maintaining a peaceful feeling within ourselves.

As mentioned earlier, being under the control of the afflictions can cause us to lose that peaceful feeling within our mind. So, we need to put every effort into protecting our mind from the afflictions. However, we may feel that it is too difficult to refrain from being influenced by the afflictions. Yes, initially it can be quite difficult. But we should not give up hope. In the beginning, it will be hard to stop our mind from following the afflictions completely; to completely stop them from arising in our mind. While we may not be able to do this, we can try to reduce the intensity of the afflictions when they arise in our mind. That is something we are able to do.

In particular, we can train our mind to withstand and not succumb to the strong afflictions which cause great mental agony. We can prevent ourselves from being a victim to those kinds of intense afflictions. Initially, we can prevent our mind from being influenced by the afflictions for one minute. Then, we can extend that to two minutes and then to three minutes and so on. By applying this technique, we can gradually improve our mental strength and not allow the afflictions to influence our mind. If we engage in meditation practice and sincerely adopt this technique, then, for the duration of the meditation, we will not allow the afflictions to dominate our mind. Through this training we gradually strengthen our mind and the duration of the afflictions affecting it becomes shorter and shorter. This is how the actual training takes place. With the proper training in meditation, we can reach a point where we can maintain focus on a virtuous object and not allow the afflictions to rise in our mind for up to an hour, gradually building up to two hours. In this way, we gain the inner strength to prevent the afflictions from arising in our mind. At the same time, by maintaining focus on the chosen object, we are also making the mind clear and bright. So, through training the mind, all this really starts to take effect.

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When we engage in the proper practice and the duration of the mind to remain free from the afflictions becomes longer, then, when we come out of the meditation practice, the afflictions will not arise so readily in our mind. While the opportunity for an affliction to arise is still there, we will be able to maintain an awareness and immediately recognise it for what it is. That recognition in itself will help to reduce the intensity of the afflictions, stopping them from completely dominating our mind. In this way, the time spent in meditation assists us when we are out of meditation.

Now we will actually spend a few minutes in meditation. The instructions on how to sit in a comfortable and upright proper posture is something I have presented previously.

Having adopted a proper meditation posture, we need to bring our attention to the state of mind we need for meditation. First of all, we should choose an appropriate object on which to focus our mind. Our mind is an entity that cognises. It is aware at all times. So, we have to place our focus on an object. It is like having a certain object we want to place somewhere. We need a support, like a table, on which to place the object. Likewise, for the mind, we need to have an object to focus on as a means to anchor the mind.

The object we regularly choose to focus on in our meditation sessions here, is our own breath. Thus, for the next few minutes, we will try to stop our mind from dispersing in every direction and following every thought. Rather, we will bring our full attention and one hundred percent focus onto the breath itself, being aware of it coming in and going out. This is the commitment we will make to ourselves. Our breathing needs to be in natural state, which means it should be free from deep and laboured breaths. So, for the next few minutes, let us engage in this meditation.

*[Meditation]*

While maintaining a focused state of mind, we can now change the object of our focus to the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is the name of Buddha Shakyamuni. As we hear this recitation, we try to maintain our focus on the sound. When the recitation subsides, try to maintain your inward focus for a few more minutes.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

If there is a question, I can address it.

*Question:* I was thinking about calm abiding—fully meditating with the whole mind on the object, and then I wondered where thoughts and feelings and the whole sense of personality is, while the mind is fully focused. When we come out of that meditation, they kind of pop up again. Also memory: I was wondering where the memory in the mind is. I am just trying to get an understanding of this.

*Geshe-la:* When the conscious mind is completely focused on an object, like when having a single-pointed focus, then the other states of our mind, such as feelings, emotions, thoughts, memories, all of that, actually go into in a latent state, where they do exist but in an unmanifested state. So, they are still within us, but they are

in a latent state. They are not active or at a manifested level. That is how it is described in the teachings.

So, I think that will be sufficient for tonight. Thank you very much everyone.

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo  
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Edited Version  
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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

18 April 2018

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As usual, let us adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture. As I regularly share, this posture can facilitate a more calm, relaxed, clear and bright state of mind.

It is essential to consider how to adopt a clear, bright and lucid state of mind.

The advantage of having a clear, bright state of mind is that we will be able to identify our state of mind more adequately, particularly in being able to recognise certain faults that may be within the mind, as well as certain qualities. In a normal state of mind, this may be a bit obscure to us, but when we are in a clear state of mind, it becomes more apparent. This is important because we have a tendency to blame external conditions and situations for mishaps that occur, but in fact there are many causes for faults within oneself, which is important to recognise.

When we get in tune with ourselves, we will be able to acknowledge that a lot of mistakes are faults that we can recognise through our own experience.

All of us have noticed that at certain times we feel exceptionally relaxed and in a clear state of mind, and this is when we are more likely to be in a joyful and happy state of mind. This is a quality we already have, which becomes more apparent when we are more genuinely mentally relaxed.

At other times, we will notice that our mind can be a bit dull or foggy, with a sense of sinking within ourselves. Furthermore, we may notice that the mind is quite agitated and in turmoil. In instances like this, we would notice that it is not conducive to be in this state of mind. This state of mind is to our disadvantage rather than our advantage.

If we allow our mind to be in a dull and agitated state, and we become adapted to this state of mind, then it will start to become quite predominant. As a result, our life starts to take a turn and we will become unhappy and in a gloomy state. We will notice this after some time as we start feeling a bit unsettled within ourselves.

When our mind becomes obscured and we feel down and in a sinking state of mind, then we are prone to feeling agitated at any time and any given instance, and particularly very prone to feeling anger towards others or situations. The mind can become temperamental and easily upset with things, which can include those who are close to us, such as our immediate relations. We can even start getting upset and angry with our own pets. It is unfortunate to be in this state.

When one starts to notice that this situation is taking place within one's life, one needs to make every attempt to change this and not to hold on to the situation. If the situation is not changed, it will become more and more grim, making it hard to have a happy and joyful life. It is important to acknowledge this and to make every attempt to make a change, otherwise it will become part of what one believes is one's personality. When I have made suggestions to some people to change their outlook in life and way of thinking, they said, 'That's my way and this is how I am'. It seemed like they were not open to the possibility of changing the situation, which is very difficult.

It is good to acknowledge and recognise this state of mind and make attempts to change one's state of mind and outlook, rather than thinking that one can just change the external situation. Some seem to think, 'If I change my job or career, or change my friend or partner, then things might be better', Unless one makes an attempt to change the internal conditions for one's state of mind, changing the external conditions will not really help. It may seem like things get better for a short while, but then it becomes exactly the same, and one has to experience the same situation again, continuously.

Initially when you meet someone new, it may seem like this person is so likeable, but after a while they begin to show their true colours and you will face difficulties and the same situation.

After getting into a relationship, some make comments such as, 'Maybe I have made a mistake'. At this stage it becomes a difficult situation, because when you have already started getting into a committed relationship, even if one feels it's not worth it, the other one is already clinging to you, so then it becomes complicated and that is how I see that unnecessary complications in life begin to take place for oneself.

If one is able to adopt a clear and bright state of mind, then within this state, one will be able to utilise one's wisdom and deeper insight, particularly the wisdom of being able to discriminate between what is beneficial and what is harmful to oneself. With this wisdom, one will be able to make better choices for one's well-being.

When one utilises wisdom and intelligence, one will be able to clear any doubts, which facilitates decision-making, because our doubts tend to hinder our right choices. We may wonder whether to do this or that, and we can hesitate because of doubts in the mind. These are essential points, which are not simple, but have been mentioned in the great teachings about how wisdom is a way to clear away doubts. The reason this is important is because we need to take personal responsibility to accomplish our own well-being, which is within our own hands.

The importance of utilising the deeper wisdom within oneself, which enables us to distinguish between good or bad, and what is beneficial or harmful and therefore making the right choices, is because all of us strive for our own well-being and have a goal to accomplish, so we need to utilise methods to accomplish that. If we have a big goal, but small means, it will be insufficient to achieve the goals we set for ourselves, therefore we need to apply

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the right methods, and that is why wisdom is important in accomplishing what we want.

The main point is the way to accomplish what we need to obtain is the practice of meditation, which is the most suitable means.

The way to overcome the dull, sinking or despondent state of mind and an agitated mind which is in turmoil is to adopt the practice of meditation, which is the most supreme way to overcome that.

The meditation practice is a technique of training our mind to be focused on a particular chosen object. This training needs to be adopted properly so that we can get the benefit of the practice. Initially, it will be hard for us to maintain focus on a chosen object for a long duration. It is advised to keep our focus on the object for a short duration to begin with, such as one, two or three minutes. If we can maintain a proper focus on the chosen object for two to three minutes, and due to the familiarity of having a proper single-pointed focus on the object, we can start to develop a more stable focus, and then the duration can be lengthened. This is really important, because when we initially make an attempt to meditate, it may seem like we have accomplished something by being able to focus on the object for a short while, but then as we go further, we start to notice that if we don't pay attention to the mind, it will start to wander off. It may seem as if one is in a meditative state of mind, but actually the mind is getting more and more distracted. If this continues, after a while, one becomes weary and one starts to notice that one is not able to focus at all. This is when one may give up the meditation practice completely because one will not see the value and receive the advantages of meditation if that happens. As a way to maintain and get the true benefit of the meditation practice, we need to begin with a short duration, and try to focus and stabilise the mind on the chosen object of meditation. As we gradually increase the duration, the stability will improve.

If one is able to maintain one's focus firmly and single-pointedly on the object, then a long duration is good, because this is what one needs to obtain as part of one's practice. However, if the mind is constantly wandering away from the meditation object and one needs to try to keep bringing it back, after a while one will become weary. If the mind becomes habituated - seemingly focused on the object but half distracted - one may spend years seemingly in meditation, but not being able to focus on the object properly. The great Master Lama Tsongkhapa mentioned that one should be wary about a mind which is not fully focused and stable on the object, and not get into the habit of the mind being distracted. The point being emphasised is having a stable and firm focus on the object.

What is presented here is the training of the mind, and like other studies, as beginners, we need to go through the different stages in a gradual process, therefore one begins with a stage where one is able to maintain one's focus and then gradually increase the duration. For someone who attempts to engage in meditation to assume that they can immediately have a stable and single-pointed focus with long duration is unreasonable, apart from exceptional cases where certain individuals

may have imprints of being meditators in past lives. As soon as such exceptional individuals adopt the meditation technique, they will be able to have a stable single-pointed focus right from the beginning of the meditation. Otherwise for beginners, the appropriate approach is to go through the gradual process and stages of the meditation. Even with regular studies, there are different grades you have to go through as you gradually build up to the highest education, which is comparable to the practice of meditation. This training involves single-pointed focus on the object for a short duration initially, and if we can focus well for one minute, we can gradually increase to two minutes. Along with the single-pointed focus, the mind should be in a joyful, happy and peaceful state and without losing this state. If we can gradually increase the duration of meditation, then this is the proper way.

There is a story from Tibet to illustrate this point. A particular meditator went into meditation retreat, and when an acquaintance came to see the precious teacher, the attendants said, 'You can't see the rinpoche as he is meditating in retreat'. The visitor asked, 'How can he be in retreat when he was wandering around in town?'

When the meditating rinpoche was informed later about the comments of the visitor, who had exceptional clairvoyance and was able to read the mind, the rinpoche said, 'At the particular time when he visited me, there was a lapse in my focus, where I started thinking about the town, therefore he was right'.

It is definitely possible for the body to appear to be in a seemingly proper meditative posture, but the mind could be wandering off all over town.

The benefits of maintaining a focused mind are far-reaching. Apart from developing spiritual qualities, the meditation technique is most essential to develop a focused mind, which is useful for example to enable students to be able to retain information. When one is studying and the mind is focused, one is able to better comprehend and understand the subject matter. When one spends a lot of time studying, one will not feel fatigued, because the mind is quite fresh. Likewise, in regular worldly job situations, when the mind is focused and if one maintains one's interest and focus on the job, many say they can accomplish more in the work situation. One will not feel tired or overwhelmed by their work, because there is a sense of enjoyment as well. In this way, we can see that there are many practical benefits in our daily life situation.

We will now spend some time doing our meditation practice. We will adopt a comfortable upright posture and identify the object to focus on, which is our own breath. Based on our natural breathing, we put one hundred per cent focus on the breath itself, with complete awareness of the breath coming in and going out. This is what we need to adopt as a way to be fully committed to our practice.

The commitment we make is that we will not allow our mind to follow the normal thought patterns and distractions, but to bring our focus within and place our complete focus on the breath itself. In this way, we will

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adopt this meditation technique for the next few minutes.  
[Pause for single-pointed meditation].

While maintaining a focused mind, we will now change the object of our focus to be placed on the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is the name of Buddha Shakyamuni. When the recitation subsides, we maintain an inner focus for a short while.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

If there is a question, I will be able to take one question, otherwise we can conclude.

*Student:* If all the beings were liberated, what would be left on the planet?

*Geshe-la:* The state of being liberated, leading to the ultimate state of happiness, is not going to a different universe or planet, but it is removing the causes for one's own suffering, which are the afflictions within one's mind. What would be left are happy beings. They can still be somewhere in this universe, but they will not be suffering beings, but happy beings.

Beings who were previously experiencing misery and suffering, but due to having transformed and been led to the ultimate state, will be experiencing happiness, having removed the causes of suffering.

This is a similar attitude when one develops the awakening mind, where we are striving to dedicate all our merits, and our aspiration is to lead all beings to a state of happiness and free them from suffering. This is the bodhicitta attitude.

One part of the aspiration is wanting all beings to be free from suffering, leading to a state of happiness. Another part of the aspiration, called the awakening mind of bodhicitta, is that although one has a strong intention, one will come to realise that one does not yet have the full ability and potential to place all beings in a state of happiness and lead them out of suffering. When one seeks further, to see who has the potential and where can I get the potential ability, it is only when I become a perfect being myself – an enlightened being. When I am completely free from the causes of suffering and removed all my suffering and been led to the ultimate state of happiness myself, only then will I have the full ability and potential to free other beings, because someone who has faults cannot help others get rid of their faults. One has to be free from faults in order to help others to be free from their faults.

To give a contemporary example, a father may have a wish for his daughter to be skilled in a particular area, but if the father himself does not have the skill, he will not be able to help his daughter gain those skills. It will be just a wish, but if he himself had mastered those skills and had the understanding and knowledge, then the father would not only have the wish, but would also be able to help his daughter.

With good intention, he can still pay a lot of money for his daughter to go somewhere to get a good education and master those skills.

The father would not need to spend so much money if he was able to teach the daughter himself.

I have also heard of home schooling – I don't know if it is less expensive to study at home. I have heard that when you do home schooling, it is still possible to do the test.

The means to develop the awakening mind of bodhicitta is dependent on its pure conditions, which are primarily love and compassion. That is the prior cause for developing the awakening mind. One needs to first acquaint one's mind with feelings of love for all beings indiscriminately. Love is defined as a state of mind wishing complete happiness to those who are deprived of happiness. As one trains one's mind to wish others to have complete happiness, then one starts to develop one's mind to feel greater love towards other beings. Compassion is the state of mind that wholeheartedly wants others to be free from suffering, when one sees others who are suffering. The more one develops one's mind in wishing others to be free from suffering, the greater one's compassion. When love and compassion for other beings spontaneously reach a heightened state, where one wholeheartedly cannot bear to see others who are deprived of happiness and are experiencing suffering, then the love and compassion will develop into a higher state of mind, called superior intention. In this superior state of mind, the love and compassion has reached such a level where one is completely committed to taking responsibility of freeing other beings from all suffering and leading them into the ultimate state of happiness. Prior to this, it was just a noble wish, but now the superior intention has turned the wish into a personal commitment and responsibility of freeing all other beings.

What I may have left out earlier is that love and compassion are developed on the basis of seeing how other beings have been extremely kind to us, and how our happiness is dependent on other beings, who provide us with all the conditions and means for our well-being and happiness. By contemplating this again and again, then thinking about their kindness and wishing to repay their kindness will develop into genuine love and compassion towards others. If this is taken further to a state of not being able to bear the suffering of other beings even for a moment, and not being able to bear seeing other beings deprived of happiness, it will lead to taking personal responsibility that I need to free all beings from suffering and lead them to happiness.

At this point, it will become apparent that one does not have the ability yet, and in searching for a means to help all beings to be free from suffering and to be endowed in a state of happiness, one will recognise that there is such a supreme being called the Buddha, who has the full ability to do that. Enlightenment is a state which is achievable by everyone. We all have the potential to achieve enlightenment, therefore when one becomes fully committed to the sole purpose of benefitting sentient beings, and one is fully committed to achieve enlightenment in order to lead all beings to happiness and free them from suffering, then one develops the awakening mind of bodhicitta. Having developed the awakening mind, the actual method and practices that

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are done in order to benefit sentient beings in order to achieve enlightenment is to engage in the practice of generosity and so forth, and engaging in the four means of acquiring disciples. These are the methods.

This is an incredibly profound and meaningful practice of developing bodhicitta, because as one trains to develop love and compassion and generate the state of an awakening mind within oneself, with every attempt as we develop further, there is a transformation that takes place within oneself. The anger and jealousy that one has towards others will decrease, there will be less possessiveness and desire towards others, and pride, competitiveness and all of the afflicted states of mind will definitely decrease. One will benefit by developing love and compassion, because when all these afflictions decrease, then one's mind will naturally become more joyful and happy, because the conditions for an unhappy mind is the afflictions. When they decrease, we will naturally be in a happy state of mind.

We can use a contemporary example of a mother with toddlers. This is the time when a mother seems to have the strongest love and affection towards her child. This is because children are at their most vulnerable. It is of course a difficult time, as toddlers are always prone to danger and mothers need to keep a look out to protect them. Nevertheless, mothers seem to do it willingly, without any sense of being burdened with a big task. They do it joyfully because of the strong affection and feeling they have for the child. We can see that it is actually a certain level of the manifestation of love and compassion. The mother is willing to sacrifice themselves and do anything for the young child because of their love and compassion.

His Holiness has previously shared this story, which occurred during a long-haul flight, He saw a couple with two children, an older son and a younger child. The Dalai Lama noticed that after a while, the father and the older child had fallen asleep, but the younger child was very restless and was always moving around. The mother was constantly running after him to bring him back to the seat. She was up almost the whole night looking after this small child, whereas the father and older child were still sound asleep. He commented that the mother seemed to have taken more responsibility to look after the children. The father could have said at one point, 'You take a rest, I will look after the child'.

The main point that I emphasise regularly is that the element of love and compassion is what we need to develop within ourselves, as well as a way to share the love and compassion. When there is a mutual sense of love and compassion in any kind of relationship, then there is a genuine sense of care for each other. With love and compassion, there is a genuine wish for the benefit of others, wanting them to be happy and not suffering, therefore the concern and care becomes really genuine. There is a mutual benefit when love and compassion is developed in our hearts, then there is naturally a more harmonious and good co-existence with others.

Thank you very much everyone.

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor  
Edit 1 by Ingrid Leibbrandt  
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Edited Version  
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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

25 April 2018

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We begin with our usual meditation.

We should remind ourselves of the benefits we are trying to achieve with this meditation. One reason is to cultivate more strength and energy within ourselves. Meditation can help to cultivate energy and develop our mind. Relaxing our mind brings some stillness and clarity. If we don't practise meditation, when we look at our mind we see that it is scattered. The mind is like a river. If it has many tributaries and flows in different directions there won't be much strength, but if the whole river flows in one direction the current will be strong. When we practise meditation our mind is similar to a great river where all the currents go in one direction.

The other purpose of meditation is really to safeguard the good qualities which we may already have within ourselves, which truly bring happiness, peace and satisfaction. So, meditation is also about safeguarding and protecting the qualities and important causes of happiness which exist within ourselves

And meditation also helps us to be more aware of our own self and our own mind. Through this awareness of our own state of mind, particularly through watching our own thoughts, we suddenly realise how scattered our thoughts are. When we look into our thoughts we see there are so many different thoughts, resulting in a scattered mind. Because of all the different thoughts that arise in our mind, we can see the results they bring – unhappiness, tension and confusion. We can see, because of that, there is no peace and happiness within us. In this way, we can recognise that, in fact, these uncontrolled thoughts are really the main cause of harm to our wellbeing and happiness. We can also see how, because of these thoughts that, even though we may normally be very energetic and confident and feel we can achieve anything, when our mind is filled with so many thoughts somehow we lose this interest, courage and spirit and even feel very low self-esteem. In this way, meditation can help us to recognise how, more than anything else, our own state of mind can be our main inner enemy or something which brings harm to our life.

As we sit in meditation practice we can also recognise how the technique for peace and happiness within ourselves can be simply to direct our mind to a specific given object and focus the mind only on that object. Even though it is only a discipline to the mind to sit on that single object, the outcome of this meditation is that we can begin to feel relaxation, a true sense of stillness, peace and tranquillity. When we do this we also notice that somehow a lot of problems or difficulties that we may have are gone or have lessened. We also feel more

controlled. We feel that, in fact, we have control over our own self and our own life. Through this, more confidence arises within ourselves.

When we do not recognise the energy or self-potential that already exist within ourselves, then no matter what we have achieved in life we feel like it is all empty. We even say to others that we don't feel right or happy. No matter what we have achieved we feel that sense that there is something lacking, that somehow we cannot enjoy life. Anyone who goes through this kind of thing is very sad and may also feel very helpless, as if they come to a dead end and there is no solution to these problems.

However as said before, if through meditation practice we are able to recognise this potential within ourselves, then irrespective of the other conditions there is happiness and peace that we can access within ourselves. Then, regardless of what we are facing, at least there is still some sort of confidence and hope of improving the situation.

Meditation also helps to bring clear thinking. Through this ability to make clear decisions, like knowing what to do, what not to do, and the wisdom and knowledge that we gain through meditation we are able to be clearer about the reality of situations and be in a position to accept the events of the life as they arise.

There is nobody in the world who doesn't have problems or who doesn't have anything to complain about. We all have some problems, whether we are well off or poor, whether our social position is high or low. If we ask people, everyone has their own problems. We can also see how people are different in terms of how they cope with and manage and various problems. Some people can manage and cope with great hardships; whereas there are others who cannot cope even with very minor problems in life.

The main reason there is the difference is not the external hardships. Rather, it has rather more to do with how they view situations inwardly and their level of tolerance to hardship. If our level of tolerance to hardships is very low, then we can always be overwhelmed by hardships and we can never get over it.

The great Indian master Aryadeva said that people with higher status in society experience more suffering on the mental level, whereas those with lower status in society experience suffering more on the physical level. Whether we look at the very rich or the very poor class of people they have their own problems. The type of the problems they experience can be very different.

In the poorer class it is more to do with meeting the day to day needs of life and there is more physical hardship. However, among poor people there are some who can cope really well. No matter how the intense their hardship is they do not show any signs of unhappiness.

Then there are people who are rich and have favourable living conditions: though materially there is nothing to complain about they suffer on a mental level. How they cope has much to do with their inner life, their knowledge, their confidence, their discrimination and so forth. The point is that our perspective makes a huge difference to our experience.

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Having this ability to challenge difficulty makes a huge difference. If you lack this it is as though the difficulty is winning. In order to have more resilience and courage in difficult situations, it is important to have a clear mind. One of the benefits of meditation practice is to enhance this clear thinking. No matter what situation we face, if we see some hope and if there is some sort of knowledge, we can see a way out of that hardship. If we lack that clear thinking, hardships can completely overwhelm us, and it can be very difficult.

If our mind is disturbed and in bad shape, we feel very disturbed and it is very difficult for us to achieve anything or to do anything properly. For example, if someone who is very good with numbers, like a mathematician, is mentally disturbed or there is something bothering them they can easily make a mistake even with a simple calculation. It is important to understand the benefit of actually taking care of our mental wellbeing. Mental wellbeing, is not just about mental health. It is also about physical health. When we are feeling mentally disturbed or bothered it can make us shake physically and for no reason we lose our confidence and feel frightened and insecure.

Meditation is an effective way to stabilise our mind. It is really important because in order to develop clear thinking, we first of all need to stabilise and clear our mind of distractions. Through meditation practice we remove distracting thoughts and through this we rest our mind and feel some stillness within ourselves. Through inner stillness we can cultivate clear thinking and then we can see the benefits.

Meditation practice is also about disciplining and controlling our mind. In normal situations we are completely driven by our mind and our thoughts. If the thought that leads us is something very disturbing and negative and we follow it, then it will only lead us to more unpleasant or disturbing situations. When something disturbing arises someone with a good understanding of meditation practice can realise that it is possible to get rid of and overcome those thoughts. They can understand that you don't have to be enslaved by your own mind. Instead you can be the master of your own mind.

From this perspective, the suffering that we experience in life is very much related to our own mind; it is because of our way of thinking. Meditation is very much aimed at educating ourselves about the mind, its way of thinking and the skills to bring change within our mind. Thus, we can see that meditation is very useful for our life.

Lord Buddha himself said that when our mind is controlled there is happiness, but if our mind is not controlled, there is no happiness. If we reflect on what the Buddha has said and relate this to our everyday life experience, in terms of the relationship between our mind, our actions and our experience, we can clearly see the benefits of working on knowing and subduing our own mind

Now we will meditate. Make sure that you have the right sitting posture and, most importantly, ensure you feel comfortable in this sitting posture. There are certain postures which are not suitable, and which can prevent

good concentration during meditation practice. It is important we choose the right posture and feel comfortable and relaxed in that posture.

We also need to have an object of focus for our mind during meditation. Without an object to direct our mind to, it can easily wander off. The object we choose should not be a cause of mental afflictions or negative states of mind. For this meditation, the object of focus we choose is our own breath going in and out. This is good choice because it is something which doesn't require effort to understand or recognise. For the breath there is no colour and no heat. We simply inhale and exhale.

Focus the mind on the incoming and outgoing breath. Feel comfortable and relaxed. Make sure that you are empty of all disturbing thoughts or external distractions. Try to get rid of all thoughts, then slowly direct the mind to the incoming and outgoing breath. Be aware only of that incoming and outgoing breath.

*[Meditation]*

While continuing with the inner focus, we will now chant the Buddha's mantra. As we chant the mantra direct the focus of the mind to the sound of the mantra and keep your focus on the sound of the mantra that we chant.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

There is still time for maybe one or two questions. Today is a public holiday, but it's not public holiday for me.

*Question: Does it matter if cats or other animals are present while we meditate at home?*

If your cat or any animal comes sit next to you when you practise meditation it is a good sign. For the cat it is also very beneficial if you chant mantras, like the Tara mantra. They can hear the mantra and will feel the vibration of that mantra, so will be very beneficial for them.

The main reason why the animal comes very close to you and wants to be near you is the care and the love that you show to them. In that kind of atmosphere, in the love and care that you provide them, they will feel very safe, peaceful and happy. They want to sit next to you because they feel very comfortable and secure. The indication that the animal is showing their friendship is when they come close to you. It is the consequence or the benefit of the love that you extend to them. His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that, like humans, animals acknowledge when someone shows love and compassion and they show their appreciation to the people who show love and compassion to them.

The words, 'love and compassion' are my favourite words. I always feel great delight when I hear people talk about their practice of love and compassion.

Do you have another question?

*Question: Some texts say that we should give to others what makes them happy. What if someone wants me to give them something like heroin, because they think that that is what will make them happy?*

We are supposed to be giving whatever we believe is in the best interest and is beneficial to other beings. If you believe it is something harmful, you should not give it to them.

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If whatever you give is beneficial, then it is the right thing. This question that you have asked is actually raised in some texts. What is important is your sincerity and genuine motivation for giving. That is what you have to focus on. If you genuinely want to benefit someone, you won't give something which you believe will not benefit them.

In the instance of someone who is a serious alcoholic, and you really want to help them, but the only the only way you could help that person is to give a little of what he wants, that action can be justified because in that kind of situation, you can't see any other way. It is your intention that is important.

The key thing is that we have to do something which will benefit other sentient beings. Lord Buddha said, 'If you do something which benefit others, that is equivalent of benefiting me. If you do something which harms others, then it is also the same as harming me'.

When we give to others something that is generally regarded as not very beneficial, it can end up as being very beneficial to a particular being.

There was one Tibetan who was sick, with a lot of problems with diarrhoea. He asked the people to give him an alcoholic drink. He said that if the diarrhoea was so critical, he was going to die anyway, they should just help him out and give him a drink. After they gave him the alcohol he recovered. So, in fact, this person knew that one of the causes of his diarrhoea was a lack of heat or something in his body and he knew alcohol could help. The people who gave him the alcohol didn't know the real cause, but they gave it with good intentions and to please him because he was desperate. In that situation it helped the person. Doctors also know that for some patients, heavy drugs can be very useful and giving them will help the patient to recover.

In the scriptures, there are objects which we are forbidden to give, like poisons, weapons and so forth. That is the general recommendation. However, there could be situations where certain poisons can be healing and therefore beneficial to the recipient. This situation is an exception to that rule.

Thank you

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo  
Edit 1 by Carla Betros  
Edited Version  
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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

2 May 2018

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Tonight we will meditate together.

What is important for meditation is that you have a comfortable sitting posture and that your whole body is completely relaxed. Then you direct your attention to your mind and make sure that it is very relaxed.

Whatever activity we undertake, we have to check whether conditions are favourable or unfavourable. We need to think about possible obstacles. For meditation practice to be effective and beneficial, we need to have a good understanding of the things that make meditation effective, what conditions are favourable and what obstacles can prevent good practice.

The main tools that we need to utilise in our meditation practice are mindfulness, introspection and mental alertness. Equipped with these tools, the main challenges that we face in meditation are 'mental sinking' and 'excitement'. Both are detrimental to meditation practice.

We have to understand that, like anything else, in order for our meditation to be successful, we should acquire knowledge of how to develop good skills. We need skills as well as knowledge to meditate. If we are very clear about what these are and are able to recognise the shortcomings which affect our meditation, as well as working on creating favourable conditions, we will make our meditation successful. If we have an understanding of the details of 'mindfulness' and 'introspection', we will be in a better position to be able to effectively use these tools in our meditation.

If we want to reduce negative and create positive qualities and we investigate carefully, we will realise that they depend on our own mental outlook. Important aims of meditation are to control, transform and safeguard our mind. When we talk about mindfulness, introspection or alertness we have to understand how these tools can actually help us to transform our negative states of mind.

Shantideva said, 'with my hands folded together I advise those who want to transform and subdue their mind, to apply mindfulness and alertness, whatever it takes'. Even if it takes our own life, we should remain steadfast in applying these tools in our meditation practice.

What is the role of mindfulness in meditation? Mindfulness is a mental factor that helps us to keep our focus on the meditation object. Why we keep the mind focused on the object of meditation is to free it from mental afflictions. Also, the object of the meditation is a virtuous or wholesome object. The effect when our focus is on that object is to enhance happiness, rather than bringing disturbance or restlessness.

When we talk of 'mindfulness' here, it also means memory or not forgetting. So, if we apply mindfulness our whole attention would be on our present actions. The role memory or mindfulness when we are engaging in meditation is to keep our attention only on that object.

The role of introspection or alertness is monitor the meditation. With introspection one has the ability to discern whether there are any obstacles, which cause weakening or loss of focus. When we sit in meditation we exert a lot of effort to develop the power of memory and mental alertness, or vigilance. While we are sitting we find a moment of peace and stillness, but the benefits we get afterward, are as important as those experienced in the sitting.

Also, we should understand the importance of continuously maintaining mindfulness and introspection. Even after meditation, as we move onto our normal activities, using mindfulness and introspection we should always observe our actions of mind, speech and body. Through mindfulness we will always be mentally present and remember to act in ways which are beneficial. In our daily activities using mindfulness we try to minimise any kind of behaviour which is negative and destructive.

At the same time, it is important to apply introspection, which will help us to remain vigilant so that we are in a position to immediately recognise if there is something negative in our actions. If we don't apply introspection, or even recognise negativity or the destructiveness in our actions, we cannot prevent such actions.

We can clearly see that our mind is the source of all our actions, whether those actions are positive or negative. The source of all our actions is our mind. Actions are predetermined by the mind. Therefore, we have to focus on controlling the mind in order to bring about change in our actions. If we really work hard to observe our mind and cultivate a positive state of mind, then as we make progress we will notice that automatically we find more stability, happiness and joy in our life. These experiences of happiness and joy happen unexpectedly. It's almost impossible to find enough peace and happiness if we don't work on cultivating positive states of mind and pay attention to our actions. This is because we are not habituated to a positive way of thinking and doing. When we don't pay attention, we will naturally go the other way. Our actions will be negative and therefore, it is very difficult to overcome problems. Through mindfulness we can see positive qualities and beautiful things. At the same time there are also very negative and nasty qualities inside us.

If we observe our actions - be they verbal or physical, we are able to recognise that there are a lot of actions which can be valuable, almost priceless. Likewise, there are other actions which are horrible and destructive. When we talk about developing ourselves we have to take into account the positives and the negatives of our actions and then work on them on a daily basis.

It is said in the text that the result of meditation should be a decreasing of the influence of mental afflictions. When we engage in spiritual practice, our focus should be on enhancing positive states of mind and diminishing the

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negative ones. As a result of practising meditation, we expect to see a lessening of mental afflictions.

It is not always the case that all of the people who practice meditation will see this benefit of meditation in terms of the diminishing of mental afflictions. Therefore, in order to see the expected result, it is important to know how to meditate properly and do it continuously

To experience these benefits, we need to understand what to do. The very important thing is to apply mindfulness, which means to direct our focus onto a virtuous object. Familiarising ourselves with meditation practice is a way of breaking bad habits of mind and developing a happy mental attitude. Meditation is training our mind to think in a more positive and creative way.

It also helps us to immediately get rid of anything that we find disturbing. For example, some people might find holding resentment for those who have hurt them is disturbing. In order to overcome the suffering caused by this hatred, it is necessary to look at the causes. One obvious cause is the object. Thinking of that object causes feelings of resentment. There are certain objects which it is important for us to forget. By forgetting those objects we will find peace and relaxation. There are other objects we need to remember because they bring more peace and happiness. If someone suffering from an intense feeling of resentment, is successful in the practice of redirecting their attention, they can experience peace instead of anger. Initially, this may take time, but if you manage to shift the mind to the meditation object and sustain that focus, then even if you come face to face with that person, you may not experience any feeling of resentment. It will depend on how much effort you put in. Logically, we can see that meditation is a very effective tool to overcome anger.

Sometimes it is not necessary for us to gain a great deal of knowledge of meditation, but it is more important to apply meditation practice in our life. Which practice we should apply depends on our situation. In some situations, you do not need any objects in order to free yourself from mental stress. We can find a quiet place, relax and try to empty all of our thoughts, as if there is nothing. If we sit in that kind of meditation even for a minute, we will find it very peaceful to be away from the overwhelming mental stress or the anxieties that we experience. Once we have created stillness and stability within, it is better to do a different meditation.

Now we will do some meditation.

In this meditation we will be focusing the mind on the incoming and outgoing breath. When we engage in meditation practice, the challenge that we face is the unruly mind and distracting thoughts. First sit and relax. Then direct attention to your mind. Try to keep your mind within. If your mind goes to something else, see it as a distraction. Try to recognise with a sense of accomplishment and joy that you have found your real enemy. You could think, 'It's you, unruly mind, who is the continuous source of my problems and difficulties in life. I am not going to give you a chance. I am going to challenge you and rather than being dominated by you, I will be directing myself to something else'. With this in mind, direct your mind to the incoming and outgoing

breath. As much as possible, always try to bring the mind back to this breathing.

*[Meditation]*

We will chant Shakyamuni Buddha's mantra. Keep the focus of the mind on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

There's not much time left but maybe room for one or two questions. Does anyone have a question?

*Geshe-la, do we create karma while in the bardo?*

I need some clarification of your question. If you're talking about the question as literally karma which is responsible for the state of bardo, then it's the same karma. The karma which prepares one to take a human rebirth is the same karma that also prepares the bardo, or the intermediate state for human rebirth. Is your question more to do with whether you will be creating karma while you are in the bardo?

*Student: Yes*

For those who are not familiar with this term, 'bardo' is called the intermediate state of being. It means when someone leaves this life and is when taking the next rebirth is coming back as a human being. In between is something called 'human bardo' or the 'intermediate state', which finds the next rebirth. While you are in that bardo state, there may be a possibility of creating karma. Maybe.

Any other questions?

*I was wondering if Geshe-la can verify the concept of the merit field. A merit field is almost like a place where you plant seeds. When we are referring to a merit field ... so how does it actually function as a field of merit or a merit field ... ?*

The question is related to the practice wherein the meditator visualises in their mind all of the objects of the merit field. You may be visualising all of your gurus and other deities. These visualised objects are called the 'field of merit' because they are the base upon which you'll be creating merit. If your question is whether all the objects you have visualised are real or imaginary, then it all depends. It is supposed to be real, but at the same time it could be just an image. It is possible for a meditator to develop these visualisations to the point where everything in that visualisation becomes real. You can vividly see them as though you are seeing your gurus, deities, buddhas etc. with your own eyes!

There are stories of meditators who revealed that they had actual visions of deities, such as a vision of Manjushri. You can have direct visions of the deities when you are at a very advanced level on the path. However, when you are already very high on the path, there's not much point. There's not much benefit you can get from the buddhas. Somebody who is very rich or very wealthy doesn't need much help from other wealthy people. When we are at low stages of the path we rely on the teacher, who is really like someone who gives food and shelter to beggars.

There is a great degree of emphasis placed on the great kindness of one's teacher because the immediate guru

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directly supports and guides at a time when you are in need and desperate. It is really beneficial when we are desperate.

Lord Buddha himself talked about the great kindness of one's parents. If we think about our early stage where we are absolutely helpless, we even do not even know how to feed ourselves. Even if food to drink is in front of us we can't use it. It is our parents who fed and supported us by giving immediate help and direct support.

If we look at evolution we see how, when some animals are first born they are much smarter and more capable than human beings. I once saw how, as soon as a baby giraffe was born, it didn't take long to actually find its mothers nipples and was able to stand up and find its own way. We should show our gratitude to our parents. I have never forgotten my mother although it is nearly 70 years since I left home.

I have made a lot of observations of the parent-child relationship and I really believe that the bond that the children establish, especially with their mother, is so strong. There is no doubt that intimacy with the mother is very special. You may have heard that even His Holiness the Dalai Lama frequently mentioned the intimate bond he shared with his mother.

It is important for good development that children at the early stages receive close physical affection, especially from the mother

Apparently scientists have conducted tests of two children - one who has received good affection from the mother and the other one who did not receive the same affections. The outcome the scientists found is that the one who received more affection has better development at the early stage and this has a positive impact on the later stages of life.

*Transcribed by Bernii Wright*  
*Edit 1 by Carla Betros*  
*Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe*  
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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

9 May 2018

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So as usual we will do some meditation together. With meditation, the first and most important thing is your sitting posture, specifically to adopt a comfortable sitting posture.

We know from our own experience that finding a moment to rest physically doesn't necessarily mean that mentally you will be peaceful and happy as well. In our everyday life, even if we have all the good conditions that we could possibly think of in terms of material necessities, like plenty of food, clothing, drinks, and a good house, are present, it still doesn't mean that we are peaceful and happy mentally, and in fact it is possible that mentally we could be feeling very disturbed and very unhappy. So therefore, after one achieves a very peaceful moment physically, it is then good to look within and to check our mind.

With people who have exactly the same good living conditions, one person can be generally happy and peaceful, whereas others may not have the same peace and happiness.

Also, in a domestic situation, we can have two people who are sharing the same bed, one can very easily fall asleep and there is no problem, whereas the other might really toss and turn and have a lot of sleeping problems. There is a difference there even though externally they are both enjoying the same conditions.

So, what does this experience tell us? What it tells us is that when it comes to true happiness and peace, the most important causes are the internal causes and conditions, rather than external factors or conditions.

People can enjoy the same external good living conditions, but there is a difference in their level of peace and happiness. When we look into the causes, we can see that something that is not difficult to understand. If we investigate and focus on the cause of restlessness and feeling disturbed and unhappy we see it has nothing to do with the external factors; rather it is due to the internal factors which preoccupy the mind. Such a person experiences restlessness and unhappiness because of all the thoughts in their mind, whereas others don't experience this. Rather they enjoy peace and happiness as they don't have all the disturbing thoughts and feelings in their mind. Somehow that second person has fewer thoughts, and possibly is able to control all these thought processes.

Therefore, despite all the good external factors, when we go through difficulties and problems, we cannot really blame another person or the external conditions. Where we have to lay blame is with the true cause, which is

nothing other than one's not being in control of one's mind, and consequently the unruly and disturbing thoughts within oneself.

There are a lot of instances where we can relate the cause of our problems to lack of control of our own state of mind or our own thought process. If we look inside we can identify the reason why we feel down, or why we feel tense and unhappy. We can actually pinpoint that the main reason is a particular thought process that is going on. On the other hand, there can be times when we do not experience restlessness but instead experience peace and feel very contented with our situation. In those circumstances we see that the reason why we feel positive is mainly because, even though there can be difficult external factors, one is mentally very contented and satisfied and feeling at rest. That is the main cause.

So it is important for us to realise and understand that in order to reduce the problems in life, we have to reduce or diminish certain ways of thinking, and the states of mind that serve as the main cause of these difficulties. We have to do something to reduce these thoughts or negative states of mind, and we have to realise that unless we do something, and work on reducing these thoughts or negative states of mind, there is not much possibility for one to experience more peace and happiness in one's life.

In fact, there is great benefit in just knowing one's own state of mind. If we look within our mind, we can see that there are negative patterns of thought, as well as positive patterns of thought. It is of great benefit to recognise that working on reducing or diminishing the negative states of mind can actually completely change one's outlook on life, and one's experience.

In relation to this I can share with you a story about my interaction with a younger layperson who has now become a very good friend of mine. Once when we met, this man, who had some knowledge of Buddhism, asked me if I had actually achieved what is called a state of samadhi, which is like a perfect state of single-pointed concentration or calm abiding. I replied, 'No, unfortunately not'. Possibly he made such a comment because he thought that I look like a very calm person and so he asked the question, 'What is your secret to this?'. I replied, 'There is no secret, it is just knowing my own mind and working on getting rid of all these negative states of mind'. This man really appreciated this piece of advice. Then some time later he saw me from a distance, but I didn't notice him, and later on when we met he said, 'I waved at you but you didn't take any notice of me'. I said 'I didn't see you', and then we came much closer.

The point that I am making here is the benefit of working on yourselves - as much as possible getting rid of negative states of mind, in terms of enhancing more peace, more stability, and more happiness in your life. Anyone can find peace within if they can calm their mind from all the disturbing thoughts.

One technique to counteract the negative states of mind is to just to observe the negative state of mind itself. If you simply focus on the nature of that negative state of mind itself. Look at the cause which gives rise to this negative state of mind, and what kind of effect it has in terms of

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what you do. Consider whether it is possible to actually fulfil what the mind influences you to do or not. Sometimes if you look at the nature of the mind, and investigate the negative state of mind itself, then you will notice that somehow it is actually beginning to subside and lose its force.

As you focus on your negative or restless state of mind, you can also consider whether there is any remedy to that or not. As an effect of this close observation of your own state of mind, you will notice that in fact the force of the negative state of mind diminishes. One of the main reasons why it diminishes is nothing but the outcome of you being in that moment, relating to your own mind, and actually abiding within yourself.

When you focus on your mind it is like you are abiding in your mind, your thoughts are within yourself rather than being under the influence of external distractions. This is one way you can understand how bringing the mind inwards, letting the mind rest within yourself, benefits you in terms of enhancing peace and happiness.

There are certain states of mind within ourselves which, whenever they arise, have the effect of bringing disturbance; when you do not have this kind of mind, you notice that there is a sense of peace and happiness. So we learn here, that observing our own state of mind is like an opening to a new direction, almost like a guide showing us a new way to finding peace and happiness.

We are considering all these topics and issues, in order to show the benefit of engaging in meditation practice, and the benefit is very obvious. When we engage in meditation practice, where our main task is to really direct our mind, or mental focus, onto a meditation object and let the mind rest there, we prevent out-going thoughts or mental distractions, which are normally regarded as a source of disturbance. Meditation is, in a sense, a way to enable us to protect our inner peace and happiness, and at the same time it helps us to counteract those factors which bring disturbances.

To illustrate further, in everyday life when we say, 'I am happy' or 'I am unhappy', there is reason for us to say that. Normally when you say that you are not happy, one reason can be because you are not feeling well physically, that you have some health problem and you are sick, and so you say that you are not happy. There can also be some other factors, that when things are not right, again you will say that you are not happy. Even though you have all the other conditions in place, if your mind is disturbed, or mentally something is bothering you, you will say that you are unhappy. In that case, you are pointing to your mind; an emotional disturbance is something that lies, and you can point to that.

On a positive note, at times when we enjoy good health and we feel very good, we are able to say that we are happy. Regardless of other conditions, when you are mentally in a very good state, you will be in a position to say that you are happy. So, what we understand here is the relationship between ourselves and our mind and our body and other living conditions.

If our reason for being unhappy has something to do with our health, then, as we always do, we will take some

action to improve our health, such as something to do with hygiene, or something that is external.

In the same way, when we say we are unhappy, it is important to realise that one very important reason has nothing to do with our physical health or other conditions but is to do with something in our mind. That is what we have to understand. That this is the reason why we engage in the meditation practice, and we find that it is only the meditation practice which is effective in overcoming such problems – the difficulties related to our mind.

I have been saying a lot of things, but you have to understand that even though I am sitting on this throne, and whilst I'm saying lots of things, I don't see myself as somebody different from all of you but rather I see myself as exactly the same as everyone here. I am trying to share my knowledge on the basis of everyone here being a very close and a very good friend.

There are a few more things to add before we start the meditation. Remember what the Lord Buddha said: you can be a master of your own self, and you can also be an enemy of your own self. What the Buddha said is very true. A lot of the time we don't actually realise that we are our own worst enemy. When we think of even the physical health, sometimes we are very irresponsible for our health and hygiene. The term 'enemy' means is someone who brings you harm, and there are lots of instances in our life where we are harming ourselves. We can harm our own physical health, and by not being responsible for our own emotions and way of thinking, we can also harm ourselves a lot.

In essence, when we talk about Buddha saying that you can be a friend to yourself, we are talking about trying to adopt the right actions of body, speech and mind in our life. If we work on that, then we can create the right actions of body, speech and mind, and then we can be our own best friend, our own best protector. Being very irresponsible with our actions of body, speech and mind, what we create is unwholesome and negative and destructive. Then, as the Buddha said, we become our own worst enemy.

Now we will start the meditation. So make sure that you feel comfortable with sitting, and relax your body. Then try to get rid of all the outgoing thoughts and put an effort into stopping the mind from wandering all over the place. Try to let the mind completely rest or abide inside within yourself.

In this meditation, the object where we should be directing our mind, in fact placing a one hundred percent focus of the mind, is just on your breath, the incoming and outgoing breath.

Then, as you are trying to keep the focus on the breath, if you feel that the mind is about to take off from this focus, then again, without getting too frustrated, just simply once again focus on the breathing, and again put the mind back onto the breath. Just maintain this and continue the meditation by just mentally counting or being aware of the incoming and the outgoing breath.

*[pause for meditation]*

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So we now chant the Buddha's mantra and again just continue the meditation, but shift your focus to the sound of the mantra as we chant.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

On a regular basis it is good to do some meditation practice and know that the focus of the practice is really to train our mind. We should also know that our mind is actually trainable, but we have to be very gentle with the mind and go slowly as we look more closely at the mind. Through effort we can influence or change the mind to a happy or positive way of thinking while preventing negative ways of thinking.

This is of tremendous benefit in terms of working towards bringing peace within our mind and having a more peaceful state of mind also benefits or improves one's physical health. Further, knowing that it is possible to bring some peace and happiness through training or through working on our mind, this kind of knowledge not only has benefits now, but in fact you will find that as you get older, through this method of mind training, you will reap even more benefit.

So why I always tell the people that, is not because I have some extraordinary knowledge and experience to show you, but one little thing that I personally find very useful is working on, and making an effort to bring calmness to my mind. That is very beneficial, and it allows me to really enjoy my life, and to completely contain myself in the physical or material conditions that we have, and then just being here and enjoying. Whilst it is not great knowledge, it is a small thing that I always try to share with others.

Thank you very much.

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo  
Edit 1 by Robyn Ralton  
Edited Version  
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# *The Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

16 May 2018

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Please sit comfortably

We are here to cultivate a positive state of mind which brings true happiness and peace and also supports good physical health.

The most effective tool for developing happiness is our own intelligence. By recognising that we have this intelligent power or wisdom within ourselves and then using it, we can effectively overcome unhappiness. Through the power of intelligence, we can be our own best guide and will clearly know what kinds of thought we should have and should not have in our mind, and what kinds of actions we should and should not do.

Our main problem is not being able to recognise the true source of our unhappiness. If we do recognise it then we won't blame other people or things, which are not the cause. We are deluded with respect to the true cause of our problem, and that's why no matter what we do, we are not able to find a solution to our problem or find the happiness that we seek. Rather, we are harbouring the cause of the problems within ourselves instead of getting rid of it. Therefore, we are perpetually facing problem and not finding happiness.

It is important to take time and have a really close look at our life. As we do this, we can recognise that the main cause of ups and downs in our life is our own state of mind. For instance, when our mind occupies or thinks over some things or events, we feel sad and find it disturbing. We can clearly see the pattern of how the stronger the disturbing thought arises, the more hurt, pain and suffering we experience. So, unless we recognise that thought as the real cause of our unhappiness and then fix it, all other good conditions that we may have in life will not give us happiness or meaning to our life. Sometimes we undergo suffering and misery simply because of a thought or memory of certain things or events, yet we opt to feed that thought instead of detaching ourselves from it. It is important to be aware of our thoughts because they can have a detrimental effect on our life.

When we face problems, we need to question to ourselves. Is there a remedy for getting rid of this problem? Is the remedy in our own hands or does it depend on other people or factors? Upon close analysis we can see through our own intelligence that our mind is the primary cause of our crisis. We can see that our mind is over powered by distortion, distraction and delusion and needs to be brought under control in order to change our life for the better. As part of controlling or subduing our mind, we need to work on diverting the mind from things and events that bring disturbing thoughts, and

focus on the things and events that bring a peaceful and calm mind. Sometimes I say that we are better off forgetting about certain things and events and remembering other things.

Now, we can really appreciate the benefits of engaging in meditation practice. In meditation practice, we make a concerted effort to gain control over our mind. If it is wandering after a disturbing object we try to divert attention from that and focus on the meditation object.

In the early stages of meditation, it is not easy to make the mind focus on the object. However, if we make an effort and repeat the meditation over and over again, we can see improvement as we slowly begin to gain control over our mind, until it is eventually calm. In this way we can overcome disturbing thoughts. When we get up from meditation and go about our everyday life the meditation makes a difference. It makes us more aware of our thoughts and our ability to control them.

Meditation is also a form of mental training which is necessary in order to break down negative patterns in our way of thinking. It is important to recognise the benefit of gaining control over our mind. If we do not control the mind when it becomes distracted and influenced by uncontrolled thoughts, the result will be a build-up of stress and tension.

In meditation practice, our job is to prevent the mind from wandering after external distractions and objects that cause agitation. We need to train our mind to rest on the meditation object. If we do this properly we can feel the benefit. The moment our mind rests on the meditation object we immediately feel peace and stillness. This experience will motivate us to meditate more. As a benefit of meditation practice, even when we are not meditating we will become more mindful of our thoughts and actions. We will understand that if any unwanted thoughts suddenly arise, it is possible to remove them by getting rid of mental agitation and having some sort of restraint over our thought process, before it drags us into an emotional crisis.

One great Kadampa master, said that without knowing where the mind should or should not be going, there is no chance of finding mental happiness. Those who have mastered this are in a position of transforming adverse situations into favourable ones.

Whether we experience of happiness or unhappiness has a lot to do with our state of mind, and where our mind should or should not be going. It is therefore important that we use our own intelligence or wisdom to closely watch our state of mind and try to discriminate between states of mind that bring about happiness and those that bring suffering. Based on that, we can make effort to bring more peace and happiness in our lives.

Another Kadampa master, Geshe Sharol said that getting rid of the desirous mind is the beginning of a happy life. One major cause of our unhappiness and dissatisfaction is an unending desire that is never fulfilled. As soon as we fulfil one, another one comes. Because of this it is impossible to find contentment. That's why, the moment we get rid of this desirous mind, we will begin to find enjoyment and happiness in life.

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There are many such pith instructions by the great Kadampa Masters. Another instruction says that if we are able to be contented with ourselves in whatever we possess, we will find both mental and physical happiness, and we will make our time useful in terms of increasing our learning, contemplation and meditation. There is less to worry about in terms of accumulating more wealth or losing what we have accumulated. Contentment is very important element of spiritual practice. Without it, we won't be able to follow or engage in spiritual practice.

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor  
Edit 1 by Carla Betros  
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering  
Edited Version  
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Cultivate contentment by thinking that the very purpose of the material wealth we accumulate is to bring satisfaction which in turn more depends on our mental contentment. In developing contentment, we also need to work on reducing desire.

What we have covered here is the background or purpose of meditation, which is training and developing more positive states of mind and diminishing negative and deceptive states.

Think of meditation as an effective means of bringing mental calmness and stillness. Remind ourselves that without doing something to become aware of and subduing our mind, we will end up living a very stressful and restless life. For instance, some people are mentally so hyperactive and agitated that they can't even physically relax, even rest for a minute. They always have to do something like go out for a run.

To begin this meditation, we need to sit in a comfortable posture, fully relax the body and try to empty the mind of all distracting thoughts and external wandering. Let the mind abide within.

Focus on the incoming and outgoing breath.

*Meditation*

Continue with the meditation. Now we will chant the Buddha's mantra, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's name. Direct your mental attention on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

There's a bit of time left, does anyone have any questions please feel welcome.

Question: (inaudible)

Answer: Usually when you are reciting the prayers, the prayers should serve as a guideline for your meditation. They make it easier to meditate because you have something to follow; it can be more difficult to meditate or keep the mind in if you don't have such guidance for the meditation.

Sometimes, for example, you can use a painting as an object of meditation where in you simply focus the mind on observing the details of the painting. This also makes it easier for the mind to focus.

Thank you.

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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཕམ་ལུ་ལམ་རིམ་འགྲིང་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

23 May 2018

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The literal meaning of the Tibetan word *gom* is 'getting used to', so when we engage in meditation practice we are trying to get used to gaining control over our mind. It is indeed very important that we set this as a goal of our meditation. Hence, we need to understand the benefits of achieving control over our mind. The great Sakya Pandita said that having independence is happiness, whereas being under the control of others is misery. Supreme happiness is the happiness we find within our mind, supreme wealth is the practice of generosity and the supreme friend is an unfailing friend.

To quote Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltsen,

To be one's own master is counted as happiness.  
To be in the power of others is held to be misery.  
The chief wealth consists in charity,  
The greatest happiness is tranquillity of mind;  
Experience is the most beautiful ornament;  
The man without desires is the best companion.

So, what does it mean to gain control over our mind? What is the outcome if we don't have control over our mind and what are the benefits if we do? If we don't discipline our mind, then our mind will rule and overpower us. Have a look at what sort of mind we have? We have a mind which is very scattered, unruly and has so many negative habits. If we do nothing and let ourselves succumb to this mind and the impulses within it, then we will be completely under the control of destructive emotions like desire, jealousy, anger and pride. We know from experience how miserable and difficult we feel under the impulse of these afflictive emotions, which we need to overcome through our meditation practice. Instead of letting our mind act as if ruled by a king, we can elevate ourselves to the role of the king and rule over our mind. By practising meditation, we can achieve this because we can control the mind.

In order for our meditation practice to provide lasting benefits, we need to be clear about its purpose. The benefits should extend beyond the meditation practice into our everyday life. The aim of meditation is to counteract the destructive emotions or mental afflictions such as desire, anger and the delusions. We come to understand that our mind is plagued with mental afflictions and that there is no solution to our problems unless we do something to overcome these afflictions. As a phenomenon, we are not our mind so it's worthwhile to step outside of our mind, and try to recognise our true potential, strength, courage and knowledge that enable us to overcome the mental afflictions. Otherwise, due to overwhelming presence of the mental afflictions within the mind, we may feel weak, as if we lack self-confidence

and the potential to defeat them. The great Indian master Aryadeva said that when the Victorious One (Lord Buddha) observes a person completely overpowered by mental delusions, he sees no fault in that person. He only sees the faults of the mental delusions. So, when we see someone who is totally under the control of the mental afflictions, it is important to understand that they have no control over their mind. They have no choices but to react to the impulses of those mental afflictions. So, we cannot hold them responsible for their behaviours for their behaviour is just a manifestation of their mental afflictions or delusions. If we had this kind of understanding, imagine how it could help us in our everyday life. Normally, when our partner loses their temper, we immediately lose ours but if we had this perspective, we would be in a much better position to maintain our inner sanity, peace and happiness.

If our car is hit by a car from behind the force of the impact is so strong that there was nothing we could have done to prevent it. The force of the mental afflictions is like this. Someone we know can be very calm but the moment their mind is afflicted with the force of anger, suddenly they change. They become negative and destructive, to the point where we can't imagine that they would be like that. Even their facial expression becomes frightening. Under the influence of mental delusion, they express such destructive force even to their own children or their close partner as if they are completely blinded by the destructive emotions. But if we were able to recognise that they were under the control of mental afflictions and that it wasn't their fault, then we wouldn't get upset with them. We'd be more tolerant and patient. One form of patience is accepting harm from others and taking their suffering upon ourselves. It just takes some understanding and knowledge to be able to practise patience.

So, now we will do some meditation together. It is important to make every effort to focus the mind on the meditation object rather than letting it come under the influence of external distractions. If the mind drifts towards other objects, simply bring it back to the object.

Some of us might have certain thoughts which disturb our peace of mind and ability to think clearly and so forth. These thoughts can interfere with our concentration and spoil what we are doing, whether we are lying in bed, taking a walk or eating dinner. Therefore, we should try to recognise how destructive these thoughts can be and get rid of them. We also need to understand the cause of a particular thought.

A thought doesn't arise for no reason. It could stem from a memory or an object. If we have such disturbing thoughts, then we should try to motivate or direct our meditation practice as a way to get rid of them. Rather than letting our mind get caught up with various things and events which brings disturbing thoughts, stress, anxiety and tension within our mind, we should try to anchor the mind on the meditation object. In this case, that is our breath; ensure that both the incoming and outgoing breaths are even and flow as natural as possible. So, let's do this for a few minutes.

*(Pause for meditation)*

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Keeping our mind focussed, we will begin to chant the Buddha's mantra. As we chant, we try to direct our focus on the sound of the mantra and keep it there as much as we can.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA

Does anyone have a question?

*Question:* How do we know our act of helping others is not driven by the selfish mind driven?

*Answer:* It depends. If what you are doing is one hundred percent for others, then you are completely doing it for them. Or it could be fifty percent for others, and fifty percent for oneself. If your mental attitude is related to clinging to your sense of 'I' or 'my', then it is related to your self-cherishing mind. If you do something for others on the basis that they are 'my' family, then what you are doing is not completely for others because it is also associated with self-cherishing mind. There could be a situation where we see that our neighbour is in a far worse situation than ourselves, so we might decide to help our neighbour because they are in more need than us. This is an act where you place others before you.

Harmony and a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood in the family and in the wider community is a very important factor for bringing stable peace and happiness. That is why it is important for us to cultivate love and compassion as well as taking some responsibility of helping out others. We should love and help our father, our mother, our sisters and brothers all the time. Having a family makes a great difference to our lives because we always have someone to turn to when we need help and to share our lives with. We need to show loving kindness and care to our family members and friends and always be prepared to help them in difficult times, instead of forgetting them. In this way, if we face difficulties they will come to help us out.

This is what I believe and try to put into practice; cultivating love and compassion, as well as considering the needs of other beings. Only thinking of our own needs all the time is very self-centred. It is important to consider other people's needs, especially the needs of those close to us like our friends and family. It is important to be supportive to others and reach out and help them in times of need. It is not right when they are undergoing hardship and we forget about them and go off somewhere, like to a movie or a party, to enjoy ourselves. This is not right. So, you should take care of your family and take responsibility for meeting their needs, as well as being a responsible person in society.

The true sense of taking responsibility of other people's needs and so forth, comes from a genuine feeling of love and compassion for others. This is something I always emphasise in my teachings. I often say that the quality of love and compassion is something priceless that we can cultivate within ourselves. If we have this, then we would be able to genuinely care for and help others. As a result of showing love and compassion towards others, we will receive the same from them as if our love and compassion were bouncing back to us. Out of their love and

compassion, they then come to help us whenever we need them. It was a very good question which we should be asking to ourselves more often. We need to be aware of our thoughts and actions and whether they are related to a self-centred mind or a caring thought of benefiting others.

Even though an action is related to a self-centred mind, if it is of some benefit to other beings, then it is still worthwhile and wholesome. Sometimes, our action may be motivated by desire and attachment, yet its outcome may be of some benefit to others so from that angle it is worthwhile. However, any action which comes from anger or hatred is very unlikely to benefit others.

*Question:* Giving the description of love as a mental attitude of wishing others to have happiness and compassion as a mental attitude of wishing them free from suffering, when we cultivate compassion, aren't we also cultivating love? So, what is the difference between the two?

*Answer:* They are not the same in terms of the mental aspect and the observed object. The difference lies in the way these two arise due to the different way in which the object is observed. Compassion arises when we see beings experiencing pain and suffering. At that time, we are unable to bear the sight of other beings undergoing pain and suffering and genuinely we wish them to be free from what they are going through. This is a compassion. Whereas cultivating love is when we see others being deprived of happiness and privileges, and we genuinely feel for them and wish them to have happiness.

In terms of our response to these situations, with compassion, we will direct our actions to rescue or relieve other beings from their pain and suffering. Whereas, with an attitude of love, we will direct our actions to fulfilling their need for happiness. Hence, love and compassion are the dual principles of fulfilling the happiness that all other beings want and overcoming the suffering that they do not want; these are the fundamental principles for benefitting other beings.

Thank you very much.

*Transcribed by Kim Foon Looi  
Edit 1 by Katherine Boland  
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Edited Version  
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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཇུག་ལམ་རིམ་འགྲིང་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

30 May 2018

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To begin with, make yourself comfortable in your sitting posture and most importantly, relax the body. In a relaxed state of body, we will do our usual meditation. It's good to think about the goal of what we are trying to achieve in meditation practice. Whatever we do, we need to have some kind of set goal, so for meditation practice it is important to recognise what our goal is.

There is a general aim or goal behind every activity that we undertake. Likewise, we do the same for meditation where our goal is to achieve a state of happiness.

When we have a clear recognition of our goal, it enables us to measure our actions. We can judge the success of that action against the original goal. As just mentioned, if the general goal is to achieve happiness, and we are happy as a result of our actions, then we have a good reason to be happy with the outcome.

However, the kind of outcome that we judge as successful in our normal lives is typically in terms of the amount of money that we make. There are some good reasons why money is important, and we can easily gauge the outcome on the basis of how much we earn. There are a lot of things that we can do and can acquire with money. Of course, we are not saying that money is totally useless.

The basic goal that we look for in our life, is happiness. We can ask the question 'is happiness something that we can buy with money?', in the sense that the money actually is the happiness that we are seeking. When we talk about 'happiness', we are talking about something experienced, a feeling of satisfaction within our mind. From that point of view, it is very clear that the outer objects, such as money itself, are not happiness. If money is happiness, then we have to deduce that the more money we make, the more happiness we should be finding or experiencing in our life, which isn't the case.

Due to the fact that money is not happiness (and *vice versa*), a lot of conflict arises when people expect money to bring them happiness, especially after making lots of it. When that doesn't happen, they not only experience frustration, but it will also leave a lot of room for conflict and confusion in their minds in terms of the purpose of their life.

It is also a fact that no matter how successful we are externally in terms of creating all the good conditions of life, these conditions may not necessarily turn out favourable or beneficial for us. This tells us that external conditions alone are not enough for us to find happiness. Along with that we also need to create the internal factors for finding happiness.

This should be a topic that we all need to investigate - not just those people who are seriously looking for happiness but even sceptics. We can all look into how external good material conditions alone are not the only factor for bringing happiness. There also needs to be something else. What is that? It comes from within our mind. It is worth

investigating whether the real cause of happiness is something external or internal or both.

When we end up very frustrated and disappointed despite all of the success that we achieve in terms of the external factors of our life, we need to seriously think about what is lacking for us to achieve happiness.

We could have a situation where despite an increase in our material success and seemingly increased happiness, there is an increase in confusion and more stress and more tensions and disturbances within ourselves. So let's relax and try to think why this is the case, and especially looking inside ourselves, within our mind. Because when we talk of an unhappy experience, we are talking about something close to us, something within us. We are talking about our own emotions and feelings. We can all see some link between this disturbed state of mind (the experience within us), and our external success or external development. What we see is that within us, the immediate cause may be that we could have a stronger emotion, such as greed, some state of jealousy, pride and so forth. Then again, when we look at what brings about all of these mental afflictions, then we can relate all these to being brought about by external causes. In particular, an increase in our wealth seems to lead to increase in our mental distractions, which leads to an increase in afflictive emotions, which is why we experience more unhappiness.

The real cause or the real source of all of our unwanted experiences and the unhappiness that we go through is the mental afflictions that arise in our mind. It is as if these afflictions are 'roping' our own happiness. Therefore, when we talk of a meditation practice, what we are trying to do is get rid of the influence of these mental afflictions from our mind. Getting rid of our mental afflictions is a goal of meditation. Then whenever we engage in meditation practice, we make an effort to try to disengage our mind from all of the distractions that arouse these mental afflictions. We can appreciate that the moment we disengage our mind from all of these distractions, we begin to experience true peace and the stillness within.

A meditation practice can be applied to overcome the source of the mental afflictions that bring about suffering and misery in our life. Therefore, when we practise meditation it doesn't necessarily mean that there's just one technique or one application. It depends on what you are targeting in the meditation practice. As said before, essentially it is the technique to overcome or to get rid of mental afflictions. For example, from time to time it could be some uncontrolled hatred or anger that can be the main source of our disturbance. In that case, when we can recognise it, we need to develop an understanding of the causes and conditions that bring about this anger. Even if we don't understand much, when we engage in meditation practice at least try to shift the focus of our mind just onto the meditation object instead of pondering the object or the event that brings about the anger.

If you move or shift the focus to the meditation object then, at least temporarily, anger will be prevented. We can see that a meditation practice is a technique that is going to work and is very effective at least temporarily preventing or suppressing any form of mental affliction, which could be strong desire, jealousy, or pride. Whatever it is, the moment we engage in meditation practice, with an intention to counteract any specific mental affliction, if we place our mind on the meditation object in that way, then we at least get a temporary break from those disturbing emotions.

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In other words, meditation is a bit like getting rid of all of the 'mental baggage' that we carry. If there is something within us, we feel disturbed. Whenever that disturbing feeling is there, we cannot really enjoy ourselves, we cannot find peace. So in this case the purpose of the meditation is to get it out of our mind, and out of our system. However, you cannot do that if you keep connecting the mind with that disturbing emotion, which is itself keeping the connection with all the causes and conditions which are most likely some external event or object. Therefore, when we engage in meditation practice, when we focus our mind on the meditation object, we are in a way breaking that link between these disturbing thoughts or emotions with the objects and the conditions that bring them about.

We can see how the meditation technique is simple. Yet if we really put in an effort and try to do our best to keep our mind focused on the meditation object, then the benefit that this meditation has in terms of getting rid of or overcoming our emotional turbulence, is quite amazing. What we are trying to find out here is why we are practising meditation. In order to do the practice, we have to feel positive about meditating, in terms of having confidence that this practice is a very effective tool for what we are trying to achieve, that is, minimising and overcoming disturbing emotions.

People go through a great deal of suffering and misery because of not being able to come to terms with changing life situations. There will be changes in our relationships, for example, where the other person has decided to separate from us and it is all over. Of course, this can be very difficult for the one who is still in love with that other person. They will have to undergo suffering and pain for as long as they mentally cannot come to terms with this separation. The nature of that suffering is simply that they are mentally unable to cut themselves off from their attachment to that person or that relationship, their connection with that person, even though in a real-life situation, as far as the other person is concerned there is nothing there, no connection anymore. But it can be painful if we do not mentally come to terms with that and stop being attached to or craving that person.

I see meditation practice as something that will truly benefit a lot of people by lessening their suffering. That's why I've been lecturing on this all the time. I've also seen a lot of people who apply the meditation practice and found it useful in overcoming their difficulties, or at least to be able to better endure and get over the hardships of their life. When we talk of meditation practice, it is not something that anybody can just easily apply in practice. Even though as we just discussed before, the process and the technique sound very simple, but it's only as simple as our ability to re-adjust the object of our mind. For example, somebody who cannot come to terms with the end of a relationship can, rather than being preoccupied with the problems of the relationship, diminish their suffering by redirecting their focus to something else like practising meditation.

The longer you stay in that practice, the more your hardship will diminish and then eventually go away. In terms of the practice, being in a position to apply meditation practice mostly depends on our familiarity with the practice. It's not something that you can apply immediately; typically, you just wait until a disaster happens and then you apply the practice! Rather, it is something that you have to familiarise yourself with over a long period of time, to the point where you see your ability to overpower the mind, which leads to the ability to easily switch focus of the mind onto various

objects. As you do this, not only are you able to switch the focus from one object to another, but you can also stay with that object for a prolonged period of time. When we reach that kind of state, then we can really appreciate that meditation is an excellent tool to overcome a lot of the suffering and misery that we go through in this fast-changing lifestyle.

I also say that the meditation practice is a way to challenge this mind within us, which is a very wild, unruly, untamed and very destructive. It is like our number one trouble maker! When we look inside our mind we can see there's a pattern - the suffering and hardship that we go through are all a product of some sort of thought process that we cultivate in ourselves, without awareness. A lack of awareness means we have different thoughts in our head rather than focusing on the chosen object. We keep thinking about other things, and then somehow, we end up somewhere and we lose all of our peace, we become restless and we can feel unsettled and confused. We go through all of that and yet somehow we start to blame the difficulties and the misery that we undergo on external objects, on other people, even though all of these problems stem from within ourselves. Of course, there could also be some other problems or hardships that can in some way be conditioned by an external cause. However, at the same time, there is also an internal cause for that.

If we think of which one is more important to overcome, then we will notice that if we could in fact overcome the internal cause of the suffering, then we will be able to overcome the suffering. However, if you are trying to overcome the external cause without working on overcoming the internal factor of suffering, then the result will be that no matter how much you work on overcoming the external cause, there will never be an end to suffering because there is a clear trend with these external obstacles. When you overcome one obstacle, another one will come, so it is endless.

In short, it is important to follow up with a few points that we discussed before. Happiness is in our own hands. We are able to resolve a lot of unwanted suffering and bring more happiness into our lives - so understand that this is all in our own hands.

With this in mind we will now begin a short breathing meditation. So please make sure that you feel comfortable, relax your body and then try to settle all of the disturbing and agitated thoughts. Then gently we will direct our mental attention on the outgoing and incoming breaths, trying to make every effort to keep the focus on the breathing in and out. If you get distracted, just simply try to bring your focus back to the object.

*[Meditation]*

We can continue the meditation by directing our focus to the Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra as we chant it.

*[Recitation of mantra]*

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed by Bernii Wright  
Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena  
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering  
Edited Version  
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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཕམ་ལུ་ལམ་རིམ་འགྲིང་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

6 June 2018

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Please make sure that you are in a comfortable sitting posture and that your body is relaxed. If we can also relax our mind, then we will feel a total sense of peace within ourselves. In order to relax our mind we need to learn about how it works and how to relax it. There are many external factors providing us with the opportunity to physically relax but, if our mind is not relaxing at the same time then we cannot feel relaxed. However, relaxing the mind is more difficult. If we could find mental relaxation and happiness, then that would be wonderful. I am here to share with you how to find mental peace and happiness, in regard to which I have some knowledge and experience.

I consider myself fortunate to be surrounded by favourable outer conditions, and on top of that I am able to maintain inner peace and happiness through my meditation practice. I find that inner peace and happiness is my best companion. When our mind is not at peace, then, no matter what we do or where we go, whether we are at home or at the office, or whether we are sitting or walking, we are restless and unhappy. Experience shows that we will find true peace and happiness when both our body and mind are relaxed.

There are situations in which we are physically relaxed but not mentally as our mind is overly busy, wandering all over the place and occupying itself with all sorts of issues when we find ourselves overly stressed and tense. However, when the mind is relaxed and calm we find ourselves at peace, and then finding ourselves in favourable external conditions is a bonus for our peace and happiness.

There is no doubt that we all want peace. We want our mind to be relaxed and in the present moment wherever we are or wherever our body is. But our mind doesn't have this natural tendency of stillness. If we check our mind closely we will see that it has a tendency to wander off after external things all the time. Why is this? Well, we can notice that our mind is overpowered by the force of external agitation and afflictive emotions, so it needs to be trained to calm down and abide within. It lacks familiarity with this kind of training.

Meditation is an effective means of training the mind to abide within. It is a regulated process which helps to familiarise the mind with a positive way of thinking and with positive objects. We need to apply meditation or some form of contemplative practice because if our mind is in a negative and distracted state, we will suffer as a result of the detrimental effect it has on our life. In this way, we can really appreciate the benefits of meditation.

If we apply meditation properly, then it will calm our mind.

So, we should try to develop an understanding of our mind, of how it works and what sort of effect it has with regard to our experience and decision-making and so forth. When we observe the rational mind, we will see that there are certain states of mind which bring about unhappiness and other states of mind which bring about happiness. One factor, which allows a state of mind to arise, is the object with which the mind is occupied. This means that a negative state of mind won't arise if we distance it from the object that brings about that mind, thereby overcoming the unhappiness that derives from it. In this way, disciplining our mind in meditation practice is an effective means of preventing unwanted states of mind and emotions. Whereas, if we familiarise our mind through meditation with a positive object and positive way of thinking, we can generate experience of happiness and peace. Through the lens of our wisdom knowledge we can clearly discriminate between the states of mind which bring happiness and those that bring unhappiness. The main tool for maintaining positive state of mind is the application of the power of memory or mindfulness and alertness.

We should discriminate between positive and negative states mind; is it worth having or not; is it beneficial or harmful on the basis of its effect on us; do we experience happiness or suffering? If our mind becomes agitated, disturbed and unhappy when it is occupied by certain thoughts or objects, then we need to recognise those thoughts and objects as negative and wrong, which we need to avoid in meditation. However, any thoughts or objects that bring about peace, tranquillity and happiness in the mind should be recognised as positive and right, with which we need to familiarise our mind in meditation. This essentially explains what meditation and spiritual practice is about.

In meditation practice, we will begin to recognise the importance of our own intelligence and wisdom and how tapping into this can we prevent lots of problems and suffering. In fact, there is a tremendous benefit in utilising our intelligence and wisdom, not only in our spiritual practice, but also in our everyday life. It is vitally important and more beneficial to use our own inner knowledge than having our decisions and views always being pre-empted by outer forces and conditions. The Lord Buddha advised his followers to utilise their own knowledge and analyse the teachings regarding what is right or wrong, beneficial or not beneficial, not just following him out of respect and faith. He gave his followers the freedom to decide what is best for themselves. The development of wisdom is a very important aspect of spiritual development. Not only that but even in worldly life we will find our own knowledge is our best guide and with its support we cannot easily be deceived or cheated by others. Utilising our own wisdom knowledge or rational mind and a clear sense of judgement is the single most effective means to solve various problems and puzzles of life and what is right or wrong.

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This, the Lord Buddha taught, is the methodology of applying the Dharma. Initially, we gain knowledge by listening to the teachings given by others such as our teacher. However, such knowledge gained through another is not yet established within us. The next step is to further develop this intellectually acquired knowledge that we have acquired from others. The Lord Buddha advised us to reflect on our intellectually acquired knowledge by utilising the power of our intelligence. By applying our own logic, analysis and contemplation we should gain a deeper insight or knowledge with the firm conviction and faith in the subject matter in terms of what is right or wrong; relevant or irrelevant; beneficial or harmful. Lord Buddha devised this approach because everyone has different needs, capabilities and interests. However, through contemplation and analysis each individual will build on the knowledge they acquired from others in accordance with their own needs and suitability. Buddha said that after we have gained intellectual and contemplatively acquired knowledge, we should then distil it by engaging in meditation, and experience it as a deep meditational realisation.

You can apply this methodology right here. You have to check for yourself whether or not what you have heard tonight makes sense or not, whether it is beneficial to you or not. Then you can decide accordingly. If you think what I have said is makes no sense or irrelevant to you then you can treat it as a garbage. However, as I have requested the same in the past, you need to dispose the garbage outside, not here in the temple. Everyone has that liberty. If there is something you are unsure and sceptical about, then there is no point holding on to it and keeping it in your mind. You can simply say it makes no sense and just forget about it.

We are going to do a short meditation together. As I said earlier, make sure you are sitting in a comfortable posture. If it's not comfortable, it can interrupt your meditation. So the right sitting posture is important. The purpose of meditation is to train and familiarise our mind with the right object. Therefore, we have to know what the object of meditation is. It should be clear to you. Here, the meditation object is the incoming and outgoing breath. To meditate on this object, we have to get rid of mental distractions and ongoing thoughts and, as much as possible, apply mindfulness and the power of memory to direct the focus of the mind on the object. As an analogy, the application of memory is like a rope with which we tie the mind to the object, in this case the object to which we tie our mind is the incoming and outgoing breath. We will do this for a little while.

*(Pause for meditation).*

We will continue with the meditation by chanting the Buddha's mantra and focusing our mind on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

If anyone has any questions please put up your hand. Hopefully it's a nice and easy one!

*Question:* In a mandala, we offer objects of attachment. Why do we offer these objects to the Buddhas?

*Answer:* You are referring to the mandala prayers where we say, 'we offer the objects which bring attachment of anger'. This helps us to overcome attachment and anger. We offer the body, the resources and the virtues of the three beings of friend, enemy and stranger. What exactly is your question? Do you want to read it out?

*Student:* What does 'Please enjoy and bless me and those sentient beings to be released from the three poisonous minds. I am offering without attachment enemies, friends, strangers and those possessions which are the objects of my greed, ignorance and hatred' mean.

*Answer:* What we are offering is the body, the resources and the virtue of each of those three beings which, for us, induce desire, anger or indifference. If an object is perceived as something unattractive and unpleasing, then this induces anger and hatred. But when our mind perceives something as beautiful it, induces attachment and desire.

Are you satisfied or not? Do you need further explanations?

The Buddha is in a state of absolute purity, so there are no impure perceptions. From that angle, even if we offer, what we consider to be, an impure object, it will not be impure as an offering to the Buddha. Therefore, in the literal sense, it is OK to offer an object of attachment. Of course, if it's something we like, then we can offer it to the Buddha. There's no issue. We need to look at the pure and impure - it is subjective. In the Buddha's mind, everything is pure.

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor  
Edit 1 by Katherine Boland  
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Edited Version  
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We have to start with recognising those factors that are conducive to increasing kind heartedness and recognising those factors that are an impediment to cultivating such kind heartedness. Then we can start working on developing this kind heartedness. This practice of kind-heartedness is admired in mundane world and in terms of spiritual practice, it is the most effective way of ensuring inner peace. Through cultivating and enhancing kind-heartedness, you create inner peace, and when you have inner peace, then outer adverse or unfavourable conditions won't have much effect on you. In other words, with inner peace there is more resilience when facing external unfavourable situations.

If our mind is filled with kind thoughts or some sense of concern for the wellbeing of other beings, then our mind will naturally be accompanied by other positive states of mind such as love and compassion, and then there will be tolerance and patience. When all these qualities accompany our mind there will be no room for hostile feelings or anger or any of those states of mind or emotions that we find very disturbing to our inner peace.

Conversely, if we have a sense of concern only for ourselves, and then along with it that mind will be filled with various afflictive emotions such as feelings of jealousy, envy, competitiveness or intolerance. Due to all these afflictions we can't have inner peace and we will find ourselves in a very restless and disturbed state.

You have to see that these things are very much related to our meditation practice. We are engaging in meditation practice to develop or increase positive states of mind such as a sense of concern for other beings, as well as diminishing the negative states of mind. It is important to understand that this is what we are trying to achieve in our meditation practice.

When you engage in meditation practice, you try to direct all your efforts to overcome the negative states of mind and try to enhance the more positive states of mind. Even in day-to-day life when you are not engaged in a formal sitting meditation practice, it is also important to apply mindfulness and alertness as much as possible. You need to be constantly mindful of the importance of maintaining positive states of mind and the favourable factors for cultivating these positive states of mind, and overcoming the unfavourable factors preventing these positive states of mind from arising.

So now we will begin the usual breathing meditation. Ensure that you find a comfortable and very relaxed sitting posture, and then try as much as possible to empty your mind of all mental distractions and let it fully rest within yourself. After that try, as much as possible, to direct the attention of the mind to the inhaling and exhaling of the breath. Try to keep your focus one hundred percent on the breath without wondering off to other objects. Just focus on inhaling and exhaling for this short time.

*(Pause for meditation).*

We will now chant the Buddha's mantra; without losing your mental focus try to direct your attention onto the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA

There is a room for one or two questions, otherwise we will finish for tonight.

*Question:* Where does the name Doga come from?

*Answer:* The literal meaning of the syllable *do* means adamantine stone, *ga* means liking or fondness. So literally Doga means one who likes this stone. (but traditionally it means The Fond Stone One)

My full name is Lobsang Dorje. It was given to me by a famous geshe from my home town in Tibet, who, when he gave me this name said, 'One day this child will become a geshe'. This prophesy might be the reason why I chose the novice life. The *do* was taken from the first syllable of my second name Dorje and the *ga* is a suffix commonly added to names in the region of Tibet where I come from to shorten the name. It connotes a meaning of closeness or fondness., so people use the suffix *ga* after someone's name (usually after the first or second syllable of the name) to indicate closeness and affection. That is how I got the name Doga. Then, when I became a monk, I was given the religious name Lobsang Gyurme.

The famous geshe who gave me my name was Geshe Sangye Phuntsok. He was a prominent contemporary scholar and practitioner and also very well known for his clairvoyant powers. He had a very special relationship with His Holiness the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, that gave him a privilege of securing an audience with His Holiness whenever he wanted.

The Thirteenth Dalai Lama gave him a sangha mat as a gift which he deeply cherished, kept folded as an object of reverence and never used it to sit on. As you may know, that the current Dalai Lama, His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama paid a visit to China, and during his journey, he stopped over in my region where Geshe Sangye Phuntsok had an audience with him. At that event the Geshe-la placed that folded mat on His Holiness' table. His Holiness picked up that mat, unfolded it and commented that the mat was still in good condition. As this comment clearly indicated His Holiness' recognition of the mat as a belonging of his predecessor and hence proving himself as the undoubted re-incarnation of His Holiness the Thirteenth Dalai Lama that it made Geshe Sangye Phuntsok very emotional and tears streamed down from his eyes. This is all happened before the Chinese took over Tibet.

One of my nephews was an attendant to Geshe Sangye Phuntsok who as I said before was very famous for his spiritual feats. He predicted that although the monastery would be completely destroyed, it might be restored later on. At that time as part of the rituals, they made a specially designed tormas that had a particular decoration, which started to melt. As he had predicted, following the Chinese scale invasion of Tibet, the local monastery was completely destroyed, and now it has been fully restored. And, I became a geshe too.

Geshe Sangye Phuntsok spent his whole life following meditation practice, but now and then he used to visit a nearby nunnery as well. In the region where I come from it was a tradition that the monks pursuing further monastic study were sent to Sera Monastery. I heard a story that in his first three years in Sera monastery he

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didn't do very well. Indeed he became quite notorious for quarrelling and fighting with others and so on. After three years he went back to his home town, and then regretting how he had wasted his time in Sera monastery, and realising the importance of pursuing his studies, he went back to Sera to study and became a well known master of his time.

Later on when the Chinese came to the town, he was arrested and interrogated even though he hadn't committed any crime. From time to time a Chinese soldier would point a gun at him, and he would say, 'Why don't you just pull the trigger and shoot me? Isn't that your job? Come on you can do it'. He showed no sign of fear of dying. 'Don't hesitate. It is your job. You should perform your job!'

Once, one of his nieces came to pick him up to the village as he fell ill. She took an ox for him to ride on, but he sat on it backward. When his niece told him that was not the way to ride, he said, 'I know the proper way, but I would never want to turn my back on my monastery'.

On day there was a flock of crows<sup>1</sup> flying in the sky and one of the soldiers started to fire at them but the bullets bounced back onto his forehead and killed him. There were all these mysterious things took placed and on that same night Geshe Sangye Phuntsok passed away peacefully.

This of course all happened in my own generation, so I remember the account very clearly.

This story is also a very good example of what we were discussing earlier in the teaching. When you have cultivated love and compassion for other beings you have great strength in dealing with external situations. Because of that, even in the face of his own death, Geshe Sangye Phuntsok had no fear, no hesitation, no loss of any calmness. Even when he was confronted with an external life-threatening situation, there was no sign of him losing his mental peace.

*Transcribed by Kim Foon Looi  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnnett  
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering  
Edited Version  
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<sup>1</sup> In English a flock of crows is technically called a murder of crows.

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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

20 June 2018

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Please check your sitting posture and, most importantly, ensure that you sit comfortably and that you feel relaxed in your body.

In meditation, what we should expect is to bring calmness to the mind, and then through this, to bring about some clarity within the mind and also increase our level of concentration so that the mind will rest, and just sit where it is supposed to be.

When we engage in meditation practice, we are trying to impose some kind of discipline or training on our mind. In the same way as it is important for us to have some sort of discipline in our mundane life, as there are some rules which we should abide by. Similarly, in meditation practice, through applying some kind of discipline or rule, we are able to change or modify our mind in a way that we would prefer.

We also say that meditation practice is to familiarise our mind with a positive mental attitude, or in other words cultivate a positive state of mind. Therefore, it is a very useful training for the mind. So, as we train our mind, and if we are successful in familiarising our mind with a positive way of thinking or mental attitude, then we will really gain some benefit out of that.

The reason that we gain such benefit is because when we look into our life experiences, we can observe that sometimes the source, or root, or main cause of our problems is not something that is external. Rather it is really our mind which brings about all these unnecessary troubles and confusion, stress, anxiety, tension and so forth.

Therefore, in order to get rid of such troubling disturbing states of mind which may result in unhappiness, we need to cultivate positive states of mind, which will bring more happiness, peace and clarity within our mind. If you ask whether it is possible to bring about such transformation within our minds, then we have to say, 'yes, it is possible', and there is a reason for that.

If we observe our usual ordinary state of mind, which lacks any disciplines or rules, it has the tendency to be easily distracted. For instance, if the object it encounters is beautiful, we can easily become attached to it and even become obsessed with it. And we know from our own experience, how such obsession can become a bit like a mental sickness, something that can be very difficult to overcome, and how, for as long as that exists, we cannot really enjoy our life.

In a sense, our mind can become very familiar with obsessive or desirous emotions. When the mind becomes familiar with an obsessive desire, then that desire is either

within us all the time, or it only takes a tiny cause or factor for it to arise within us. Even if we try to forget that mind we cannot, and this is because our mind is too familiar with that emotion.

At the same time, if we look within us we will find that just as there are some emotions that we find disturbing, undesirable and destructive, there are other states of mind which can bring very positive, wholesome and pleasant experiences to our life. These positive states of mind have the effect of bringing inner peace, calmness, clear thinking and positive feelings and so forth.

With meditation practice, we are trying to become familiar with those positive states of mind that we can identify within ourselves. At the moment the force of those positive states of mind is very weak and we don't experience them very often because of our greater familiarity with negative states of mind, but at least we can see the great benefit for ourselves if we have more of those positive states of mind and greater familiarity with them.

Another aspect of meditation practice is, as I always say, that it helps us to safeguard internal causes or factors for our happiness. And if we could maintain that internal happiness, then even if we confront some adverse external situations or conditions, we have the ability to resist them, and thereby maintain our mental peace, sanity and clear thinking.

However, if we lose the internal cause or factor of happiness, it only takes a very minor external condition to put us into a very unhappy situation. In this way, if we closely examine our state of mind, and then we can see the necessity for us to have some control over our thoughts, and some sort of mental discipline.

As we consider the means of disciplining or training our mind, we will find that the only effective means is meditation practice. Therefore, we need to understand the benefits of meditation practice and how to do it so that we will be motivated to engage in that practice. We can talk about the benefits of meditation from different angles: the benefits for making progress in the spiritual path, and the benefits in our everyday life. The overall benefit is to make whatever we do, whether it is mundane activities or spiritual practices, more effective in achieving our intended results.

Think of how finding enjoyment in even small things like drinking a cup of tea or eating food has a lot to do with our mind being with us at that moment. If your mind is preoccupied with something else or wandering somewhere else while you are eating, and when you finish eating and somebody asks you 'how was your meal', you'd probably reply, 'yeah, it was great'. But if he asks what you had, you might have to think again, and maybe you won't remember. That means that you didn't enjoy the taste of food because your mind was not there with you while you were eating. In the same way if our mind is preoccupied or very distracted in our everyday life, then whatever action or work we do will be very ineffective.

The meditation practice enables us to familiarise our mind with a virtuous object. It helps us to increase the

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concentration of our mind so that we have more command over our mind, and it becomes more loyal to us; if we want the mind to focus on certain objects, it can and will, even on a single object without being distracted by any other objects. Whereas at the moment, because we do not pay attention to observing the mind, and do not make an effort to discipline our mind to sit on a chosen object, our mind is all over the place all the time. Our normal mind has an inbuilt negative habit of always being distracted, wandering off to various objects. We are doing something, or we are somewhere but our mind is doing something else and is somewhere else. If we go to where the mind is, it goes somewhere else, and when we go there, again it is not there. As a result of our mind being always scattered and agitated, we find that our concentration is very weak in whatever we do, thus rendering our action ineffective or weak in producing a result.

Sometimes when we have a very disturbed state of mind, we are overwhelmed with a lot of stress to the point that we cannot enjoy life no matter what we do. Under that circumstance, if we examine the cause of our difficulty we can clearly recognise that it is directly related to our state of mind. However, if we try to get rid of that mind, it is not an easy task for us at all, which shows up our inability to control or discipline the mind.

We can gain control over our mind if we engage in meditation on a regular basis, if we take the meditation practice seriously, and engage in it with a proper understanding. Meditation practice helps us not only to stop our mind from racing after things and to find a moment of stillness and relaxation, but it also enables us to increase concentration, clear thinking and so forth. Having gained some meditational experience in controlling the mind, then we will find that we are in a much better position to recognise any disturbed states of mind and effectively overrule them.

If the meditation practice is just a matter of someone guiding you to close your eyes and just relax, then the practice is easy. However there is a lot more to meditation practice than just that. It has the long-term benefit of developing a greater understanding of our mind. The practice entails directing your whole attention inside yourself within your mind, and to recognise that there is another dimension of yourself and your world there, and how, in fact, your experience of happiness and suffering derives from there.

When you are not happy or in bad mood, for example when there is something bothering or disturbing you deeply, then you easily react to any unfavourable external situations that you confront. Sometimes even if it is not caused by another person such as your friends or partners, you will easily blame them and react by doing something to hurt their feelings.

It is therefore important that we see the meditation practice as something that enables us to develop more understanding of our mind, and how there are favourable or unfavourable factors within ourselves that result in benefits and harm to ourselves. The purpose of meditation practice is also to clearly recognise the source of happiness or suffering. Hence meditation or spiritual

practice, is, in simple terms, a method to adopt the things which bring benefit to us and others and reject those things which bring harm to us and others.

We will do some breathing meditation together soon, where direct our mental attention onto inhaling and exhaling as we breathe. It is really very important that our whole attention or concentration is on the breath, and in that way our whole mental energy is also directed there. As we discussed earlier, the kind of mind we normally utilise is lacking concentration because it is always very scattered, all over the place, and sometimes it even makes us feel very weak or lacking energy and self-esteem. However, it is not that we do not have enough potential and energy, rather we feel that way because our mind is very distracted and scattered.

In meditation practice, as part of training the mind, we direct all our attention onto one single object, which is also like directing all our energy, potential or the force of the mind onto just the meditation object. Therefore, the more meditation practice we do, the more we become familiar with directing our mind on a single object and the better we will become at directing our mental attention onto whatever we are doing, or onto any object, or subject that we want the mind to focus on.

So now we will begin a very short breathing meditation and make every effort to try to keep the mind simply on the incoming and outgoing breath, and as much as possible try to prevent any mental distractions in this meditation.

*Pause for meditation*

We will now continue the meditation, but we will change the focus to the sound of the Buddha mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA.

Does anyone have a question?

*Question:* Has the Buddha got an omnipotent mind?

The Buddha, in his lifetime, achieved and mastered various sciences of knowledge such as art, medicine, poetry, language and so forth, and many of the things the Buddha said and predicted have now been found to be true. During his time the world didn't have all the modern equipment that enables people to see subtle objects. Yet there are some scriptures where the Buddha revealed some subtle things. In the sutra called *Entering into the Womb* he clearly explained the development of humans from the early foetal stages and so forth. How could the Buddha know these things if he didn't have an omniscient mind. I can say that the Buddha is omnipotent, but this doesn't mean that there is end to the suffering in the world.

If we want to be free from suffering, then we have to follow the example of how Lord Buddha lived his life. He was also once like us, experiencing suffering like us. He achieved the supreme liberation by cherishing other beings, whereas we are still caught in the suffering world because we still have self-cherishing. We need to remember that the state of enlightenment that the Buddha achieved was the outcome of his long, hard work, and struggles on the path. In fact, in part of his teachings, he said, 'I cannot wash away the sufferings of

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living beings with water, nor can I pull their suffering out with my hands or transfer my realisations to others. But I liberate sentient beings by showing them the truth'. So each being has to make an effort, and create the cause for achieving the state of buddhahood in the same way as Lord Buddha did.

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo  
Edit 1 by Robyn Ralton  
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering  
Edited Version  
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When sentient beings experience happiness or suffering, each individual being has to go through that – they cannot share or give their happiness or suffering directly to others. If this were possible then I would want to share some of my happiness with you, but unfortunately I can't, even though I wish I could.

Let me tell you this. Once, outside a shop I met an elderly woman on a walking frame who said to me, 'you have got a nice smile and look happy'. At that time, I would have immediately shared my happiness with her if I could, but I couldn't. So, feelings of happiness and suffering are not like material possessions which we can give to others or get rid of easily.

Let's say there is a family of four or five people living together and everybody is happy except for one person who is really unhappy and sad. The other four can't do much to immediately make them happy. The Lord Buddha said that each individual creates the causes for their own happiness and suffering.

There are some people who have commented to me that the reason why I look calm and happy may have something to do with my educational background. Maybe that is possible, maybe my feelings and experiences are an outer expression of my Dharma knowledge of the Buddha's scriptures.

On another occasion I met this lady at the St Kilda Bath. She told me she had seen me over the last two years, and said to me 'There is something in you that is very inspiring for my life', and she asked, 'Are you a Buddhist monk?' I replied, 'Yes, I am'. Then she said, 'I will be happy if I become like you' and then she said that she would look for a meditation centre. Eventually she found one and has been going there. So maybe what this says is that it is possible to be a source of inspiration for others, and in some way and other you may be able to make other people happy. I have a lot of interaction with various people and talked with them about experiences in life. One person said to me, 'Geshe-la, you looked happy and peaceful when I saw you years ago and you are still the same.'

Essentially what I am trying to say is how important it is to maintain peace and happiness within your mind. In that way, not only do you experience your life as very peaceful and happy, but you are also contributing a sense of peace and happiness to other people and to those around you.

Thank you for paying very good attention to the teaching.

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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཕམ་ལམ་རིམ་འགྲིང་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

27 June 2018

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## Is our education enough?

Make your sitting posture comfortable. We are here to train or to educate our mind; remember that is the main reason we are here. However, some of you might think, 'I have enough education and know enough about my mind'. Well, you may be right in saying this, but I challenge you to re-think about your education or knowledge in terms of its impact on your life experience particularly on your mind and feelings.

I do understand you may have been working very hard and trying your best in everything you do. But, you need to ask yourself, what sort of impact have your actions, or what you have learnt in life, had on your mind and emotions! Unfortunately, there are things that we learn and do that have detrimental effects on our mind, bringing mental disturbance, agitation, stress and restlessness. So, I am saying here that we don't need any thoughts and actions that will agitate and disturb our inner peace and happiness.

I am trying to show you different ways of thinking. We need to acknowledge that it is not always easy to maintain a calm and steady mind, and sometimes our mind becomes disturbed and agitated. However, when it is disturbed we need to consider whether there any ways to get rid of that? If there is one, then by applying that method we can pacify that disturbance within our mind.

However, if we don't apply that means of pacification, then we will never be able to overcome that problem. Sometimes the problem may subside due to other conditions, but it will come back if we have not remedied it. Whatever work or task we undertake, it is important that if we confront a problem we should focus on the solution rather than simply worrying about it. In this way the problem will not overwhelm or affect us too much. If there is no solution, then we should think 'What is the point of worrying about it', so that we can maintain inner peace and resilience.

To quote the renowned master Shantideva,

If you can solve your problem, then what is the need of worrying?

If you cannot solve it, then what is the use of worrying?

## Healing the troubled mind is the key to happiness

All I am saying here is that we need to make the best use of the unique faculty of intelligence that we all have as human beings. Therefore, knowledge relating to healing our troubled mind in the face of difficulty is something that we must possess.

The point is we need to recognise a disturbed state of mind and examine its causes. As we examine it, we will note that the kind of problem we experience at that moment is none other than self-projection of our mind. We experience the problem as the direct outcome of the outlook of our mind at that moment such as fantasising about something we do not possess or our inability to rest the mind inward. We need to understand how our mood swings and feelings fluctuate and our minds become agitated depending upon the different trains of thought or ways of thinking we possess.

Gaining such an understanding is indeed a key to our spiritual practice; we understand that 'this way of thinking makes me feel this way, whereas that way of thinking makes me feels that way etc.'. This makes us understand, 'I must change or transform my way of thinking or my mental attitude'. It would be beneficial for us to be able to change the mental attitude and outlook that brings us troubles and unhappiness. In fact, the moment we turn our attention inward to check on our mind and way of thinking, we will notice that our disturbed state of mind is diminished. As I mentioned earlier, we can recognise that quite often our problem is caused by a certain thought, and by getting rid of that thought we can bring an end to the problem. Otherwise we can't get rid of the problem.

## The main enemy for our peace and happiness lies within us

I am saying here that there are two main conditions that bring disturbed states of mind, namely internal conditions and external conditions. If we could eliminate the internal conditions, then it will be impossible for external conditions alone to disturb our mind. Whether or not your mind is able to remain in its natural state of luminous and clear awareness primarily depends upon internal conditions, not external conditions.

If there is nothing within us that disturbs or harms us then really there is not much that an external situation can do to affect or harm us. If we wish to find true peace and happiness then the only way to find it is through overcoming internal obstructions in the form of various mental afflictions. Without overcoming the internal obstructions to peace and happiness, we cannot access true peace and happiness.

That's why the kind Lord Buddha said that the mental afflictions within us are the main enemy. We need to recognise that inner enemy, challenge it and defeat it. We already know or that if we are filled with mental afflictions then we have no chance of experiencing peace and happiness. If we think about it, we can also understand that mental afflictions do not reflect the nature of the mind and they can be separated from the mind. External conditions may make some difference but the main enemy for our peace and happiness lies within us in the form of mental afflictions. The Lord Buddha, in his pursuit of the spiritual journey realised that the root cause of suffering lay within him, and that bringing an end to that was the state of liberation.

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## Meditation is the means to counteract mental afflictions

Here I am suggesting that there is an education we all can acquire and apply as an effective resource to challenge and overcome disturbed, agitated and troublesome states of mind. Since we experience disturbed states of mind and we do not want them, we need to know how to manage and get rid of them. The question is, what brings about this disturbed state of mind? The main cause is mental afflictions. Another cause is the lack of steadiness or stability of our mind. For example some people are very vulnerable and hyper-sensitive so that they are easily affected by even minor causes, whereas other people are not as vulnerable and have a greater resilience, so that they aren't affected even by major events.

We must understand the situation as it is. To be honest, at the moment we don't have absolute peace and happiness that results from uprooting mental afflictions. Nevertheless, we can find temporary peace and happiness through overcoming immediate or manifested forms of mental afflictions, such as overcoming a very forceful afflicted state of mind. From the moment it arises we find ourselves deeply disturbed and hurt. The fact of matter is that if we don't let our mind go after the object that gives rise to afflicted states of mind then there is no cause for mental afflictions to arise within us. Due to the ceasing of manifested mental affliction, we can find temporary peace within our mind.

In fact, one of the features of meditation practice is to set our mind on a wholesome object, thereby freeing it from the dominance of an afflicted mind. As we meditate, our mind will gradually become familiar with resting on the wholesome object, and as a result all the disturbed states of mind will cease, and this in turn will enhance peace and happiness within us.

Each afflicted state of mind has its own object that serves as its cause - there is an object for anger and an object for attachment. There are times we don't have attachment or anger because our mind is not engaged with the respective object. Hence, as a remedy to counteract the problem of mental afflictions we engage in meditation. Even if the duration of the meditation is only a minute or two, if we fix our mind on the meditation object we will notice that our mind finds it very relaxing and healing. The benefits or effects of engaging in meditation also include bringing more clarity and stability within awareness, increasing memory, clear thinking and concentration. So we can see that meditation practice is an excellent tool for inner stability and strength.

Before we commence the breathing meditation, once again understand that the purpose of this meditation practice is to free ourselves from the power or the influence of the mental delusions. Therefore, as you engage in the meditation practice you have to say to yourself that at least for the duration of this meditation practice, you are not going to give any disturbing thoughts or the mental delusions a chance to control your mind. You are in charge of your mind and

yourself. With this motivation, as we begin the meditation, make sure that you feel comfortable and you feel the relaxation of your body. Then try to rest the mind inward by overcoming all of the distracting thoughts, and as much as possible try to discipline or direct the full attention of the mind onto the inhaling and exhaling of the breath. Make every effort to keep the mind on that. So we can begin the meditation now.

*[Meditation]*

We can begin with the chanting of Buddha's mantra and also continue the meditation by focusing on the sound of the mantra without being distracted by any other object.

*[Recitation of mantra]*

Thank you for coming.

It's good to try to do meditation every now and then. You can find this meditation practice very effective and very beneficial in terms of bringing peace and stability within your mind.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed by Bernii Wright*

*Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena*

*Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering*

*Edited Version*

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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཕམ་ལམ་རིམ་འབྲིང་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Interpreted by Sandup Tsering

4 July 2018

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Please make sure that you are in a comfortable sitting posture and that your body is fully relaxed. It is important not only to feel relaxed in our body but also in our mind. When we experience true relaxation in both body and mind, we experience true peace. Our experience of peace and relaxation is something in our mind, where we can say, 'I feel peaceful and relaxed'. The conditions which enable us to say this have a lot to do with our state of mind. Therefore, we must ensure our mind is not under the influence of wandering or racing thoughts. It stays with us wherever our body is.

Our existence is constituted of something we call, 'my mind, my body and me or the 'I'. It is important to understand the relationship among these three; particularly the mind and body relationship which has a great impact on our emotional wellbeing. Whether we are peaceful and happy or not very much depends on the state of wellbeing of our mind and body. When there is something wrong with our physical health we say, 'I don't feel well'. Likewise, when our mind is agitated or bothered by something, we say, 'I don't feel right.' Therefore, there is a clear connection between the mind, body and us. Our emotional wellbeing is pre-determined by our physical, as well as our mental and psychological health.

Whether we consider ourselves a believer or non-believer, regardless of what activities we do or different views we hold, our over-all aim and objective throughout our life is the same— that is to get rid of or avoid things that are harmful and to adopt or achieve things that are beneficial. What things should we adopt? We have to adopt something beneficial; something that gives us a sense of achievement, fulfilment and satisfaction. On examination, we will see that the most important factor for our wellbeing is enjoying good physical and mental health. When people enjoy good health and feel good in both mind and body, they can say they are happy. Therefore, we have to recognise that no matter what we do in life, our physical and mental health should be given the top priority and taking good care of your mental and physical health is fundamental to living a happy life for everyone. If we do something harmful to our body, then we are harming ourselves. If something damages our physical health, then it has a detrimental effect on us, so we should avoid it. On the other hand, when something is good for our body and mental health, it benefits us. so we should make an effort to adopt a positive habit of doing things which benefit our health.

We should have more awareness and understanding of our physical hygiene. When we recognise the importance

of good physical health, we will focus on maintaining it. As to good mental health, we are talking about having a calm and happy mind. We need to recognise the importance of having that kind of mind and examine what jeopardises or enhances our mental health.

There is a lot to learn to maintain good physical health but simply gaining knowledge is not enough. To ensure good health, we also have to implement that knowledge. When we talk about physical health, we are really talking about what goes into our mouth, like food and drink. This is obvious. We may question why we eat and drink? Is it mainly the taste? On examination, we should know that the main reason we eat and drink is to sustain our body and life. Taste is also important, but it is not the main reason. There is a tongue consciousness which senses the taste through the taste buds, which are along the sides of tongue. But we all know that once we swallow and the food goes down there is no taste. We should not put everything into our mouth, whether it be food or drink, just for the sake of the taste or some immediate feel-good effect. We have to consider its long-term effect once it goes into our system, particularly at a young age when your body is fresher and cleaner than when we are older.

As you know some food and drinks carry toxins which, even if they don't have an immediate affect can damage our health in the long run. The poison in our system will slowly build up and sometimes, in later stages, people find it difficult to cope with their deteriorated physical condition due to the built-up toxins. When we talk about ensuring the health of our body, we not only need to be educated but we should also think seriously about the importance of enjoying good health to live life fully. We need to remember what is good or bad for our health and then be mindful of what we eat and drink and adhere to our discipline.

Just as our physical health is important, we need to ensure the wellbeing of our mind in order to experience joy and happiness. First of all, we need to recognise the importance of guarding our state of mind. When we think about how we can safeguard the good health of our mind, we will realise that meditation practice is the most effective thing and we will consider engaging in that practice. In fact, the very purpose of meditation should be to safeguard our mind. What does safeguarding our mind mean? Safeguarding from what? When we look within ourselves, we see that, fundamentally, we have creative and positive potential. However, when our mind falls under the control of sudden afflictive emotions such as strong anger, we become helpless and we lose our self-control. When someone is completely overpowered by strong hatred and anger, they have no choice but to be totally driven by their hatred and anger. Therefore, safeguarding here means to protect our mind from afflictive emotions. Without afflictive emotions, we can have access to and be able to utilise our own true insight-wisdom-knowledge which will ensure our deeds are right and positive.

If we don't challenge the afflictive emotions arising within us, they then will overpower our mind, thoughts and actions. We human beings have great potential,

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knowledge and wisdom but unfortunately, when we are completely overwhelmed with afflictive emotions, we don't have the chance or the option to utilise these positive qualities. If we don't do anything to challenge afflictive emotions, then we are placing our future in the hands of emotions such as obsessive desire, jealousy, anger and hatred. We know from experience how we feel when these emotions overtake our mind. We can see people harming others and how they lose peace and happiness; their minds overpowered by afflictive emotions. Therefore, we have to understand and recognise that just as, due to certain causes and conditions, these afflictive emotions arise, likewise due to other causes and conditions these afflictions can be brought to an end. There is a possibility to manage and overcome them. When a sudden and strong afflictive emotion arises, what does this indicate? If we look into it, then we will see that it is because we have become so habituated to it by regularly feeding it over a long period of time. We have become too familiar with that emotion and so it is very difficult to overcome. If we are very familiar with a particular afflictive emotion, then it only takes a minor cause for it to strongly arise. Whereas, if we are less familiar with it, then it won't arise so easily. This shows that the fluctuation of arising emotions depends on familiarity with those emotions. It also shows that there is the possibility of overcoming and minimising these afflictive emotions.

Meditation practice can help us to overcome afflictive emotions. When we look at the causes and conditions which give rise to afflictive emotions, such as desire and attachment, we see that they usually arise because we perceive a desired object as being very attractive. Regardless of the reality of the object, we mentally project beauty and attractiveness onto it which then arouses desire and attachment. In order to overcome this propensity, we must train the mind in meditation to perceive the object another way.

We see the ugly side of the object, reinforcing this image in meditation and thinking of the shortcomings of our attachment to the object. When we develop this way of perceiving the object, it counteracts and minimises desire.

There are also meditation practices to remedy anger and hatred. It has to do with our perception of the object as an object of hatred. In order to motivate ourselves to engage in meditation practice we need to recognise the shortcomings and disadvantages of being angry. We can say, 'I must get rid of that otherwise there will be a lot of disadvantages'.

When we have understood the shortcomings of hatred and anger, we can overcome them by cultivating love towards the object of hatred. We imagine the positive aspects of the object. If we have a negative state of mind, then we can see there's an opposite force to that. Therefore, meditation practice is a practice of training our mind to become more familiar with a positive way of thinking on wholesome objects. As we train our mind to think positively about objects, it has the effect of remedying the negative force and minimising our negative states of mind.

It is said that the breathing meditation is particularly effective for overcoming the various disturbing thoughts which fill our mind. In terms of the object of meditation, the breathing meditation is very simple. We inhale and exhale. It does not require a lot of study or any need for logic. The breathing meditation is the preliminary practice and is a prerequisite to other forms of meditation practice.

For our practice to be effective, we have to ensure we have a calm state of mind. If our mind is very distracted and going everywhere, if there is too much noise in our head, then it is very hard to begin the practice. Therefore, it is recommended to begin with breathing meditation. This directs the mind inwards. We become aware of inhaling and exhaling, thinking, 'I am breathing out', and 'I am breathing in'. We repeat the same cycle. Initially, you may only be able to do 3 or 4 rounds of breathing with good focus, but if you practice over and over again you will be able to maintain focus for up to 21 cycles of breathing. Your mind will stay still, and you will feel very calm. When this happens, you can see the freshness, vividness, clarity and luminosity, or simply the awareness of the mind. When we recognise this, we can find ourselves in whatever practice we do. With this in mind, we will do the breathing meditation.

Of course, there are meditators who want to achieve the state of meditation called *samadhi*, or 'calm abiding' in which they may choose this breathing on a focus object. In this situation, this becomes their main practice. Likewise, breathing meditation is our main meditation here. Just try to sit comfortably and relax your body and then focus the mind just on the incoming and outgoing breath. We always start with the sitting posture, ensuring that our body is relaxed. Then we direct the mind inwards. It is important to begin the meditation with a strong motivation and determination. We determine that during this short meditation, we will not allow any objects or thoughts to distract our mind and we make sure that our mind is focused on the incoming and outgoing breath. If you are distracted by any thoughts just bring the mind back to the object.

*(Pause for meditation).*

We will continue with the meditation by chanting the Buddha's mantra. Move your mental focus to the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor  
Edit 1 by Katherine Boland  
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering  
Edited Version*

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us that it can be solved by our own mind. As is also said, if a problem is created by a human then a human can solve it.

When we talk of bringing about change in our minds, we need to understand that every state of mind has an opposite force. These two forces, the negative state of mind and its counter-mind the positive state of mind, counteract each other. This means we have certain states of mind that have the effect of bringing unhappiness. Hence, when we experience states of sadness or disturbing thoughts we need to remind ourselves to understand this mind, how it arises, then how to counteract it by cultivating the opposite mental attitude. For instance, if someone is well trained in the practice of patience or tolerance, whenever they face certain adverse situations they can always modify their way of thinking. One of the type of patience is called *the patience of accepting suffering*, as this refers to voluntarily accepting the difficulty or suffering. People with this type of patience will be able to better tolerate their suffering and unfavourable situations. There is also *the patience of non-retaliation*, which refers to situations where somebody is trying to provoke, but where one is able to remain calm because of the ability to maintain a tolerant mental attitude towards that person.

In everyday life it is important to maintain a positive and peaceful state of mind especially when confronting difficulties. For example, if your friend is in a bad mood and expresses that to you, in that particular moment you have a choice of either reacting to it in which case you make the situation worse or use your wisdom by understanding that your friend is in a very volatile situation and be more empathetic. If you are reactive, you too will lose your peace and happiness and it will get worse. In a situation like that, if you choose not to react and remain peaceful (if possible showing caring and affection towards the person, even if you have to verbally say that you care for them, or 'I love you' etc.), even saying very few words makes a big difference in helping the other person. I have seen the immediate effect of people expressing their love to each other, and how this can actually bring them closer and support each other. What we are focusing on here is understanding how beneficial it is in our everyday lives to make situations and relationships better by maintaining a positive state of mind, and trying to express, as much as possible, verbal or physical actions that show positive qualities.

In everyday life, in situations where let's say your friend is in a very unhappy state, you can see something is not right even from their facial expression. In those kinds of situations, you should truly share love with that friend. Your mental outlook should be that you are concerned about the friend, not feeling 'Why are they showing such a negative face to me?' You should understand the fact that the friend is in a bad mood, and that this just shows that something is not right, that the person is not happy. Then, if you have an attitude that shows your concern for your friend, then you personally will not get upset or feel bad towards them. If possible, you should be supporting your friend. As I said before, do whatever it takes to show your intimate feelings towards them as a way to support them, even verbally saying that you care for them, love them etc. Showing your concern and care for friends means in spiritual terms is that you wish your friends have happiness.

Any small thing we do to support our friend can be considered part of our practice and part of training of our mind to develop love and compassion. In a situation where your friend is very, very down, if you have to, force yourself

to make a cup of tea and with a nice expression, nice words, as even this can help. Somebody said they've been trying this and that it was very helpful, but said it is not easy when the friend is always in such a bad mood. This kind of difficulty shows the positive state of mind is not strong enough, hasn't developed enough, and that we need to do more training to develop a deeper positive habit. An effective way to develop a positive state of mind is meditation practice. If the counterforce to a positive state of mind is mental delusions or afflictions, we cannot control our mind when it is under the power of mental delusions. Therefore, you should view meditation practice as a way to be in control of your own mind to protect it from the mental delusions. In other words, to gain full control over the mind is another purpose of meditation practice.

If you gain control over your mind, you have gained freedom, which means happiness. If you win over the mind, then you could even sleep better. There is a practice called creating a protection wheel, where when you go to sleep you imagine red light rays or nectar coming from Lord Buddha forming a tent of red light around your body. Then you imagine red lights in the form of spears shooting forth from your body in all directions, striking at all the hindrances, spirits, harms and obstacles. If you do this meditation properly then you can always sleep peacefully because all the obstacles and harms get pacified.

If you are able to gain full control over your mind then you can experience a total sense of peace and happiness without feeling any fear. With this understanding we can now continue with our meditation. Make sure you are sitting in a correct posture, and then relax your body. Try to calm your mind fully by overcoming all the external distractions. Then we can do the breathing meditation focusing on the inhalation and exhalation of the breath.

*[Meditation]*

Now begin the Buddha's mantra chanting, again without your mind wandering. Keep your mind on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo*

*Edit 1 by Jill Lancashire*

*Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering*

*Edited Version*

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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཕམ་ལམ་རིམ་འབྲིང་བ་བཞུགས་སྒྲོལ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

18 July 2018

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As usual we should begin with a comfortable sitting posture and a fully relaxed body, and upon finding ourselves physically at ease it would be great to also achieve peace and rest within our mind.

It is very important to understand the benefit of achieving some sense of peace and happiness within ourselves at a mental level. Our usual thoughts about peace and happiness and the degree of satisfaction and comfort that we seek in life are mostly based on the values of external world, and this is not necessarily the right way. Rather, if we closely investigate the true source of peace and happiness beyond the external objects, we will find that the causes lie within ourselves at the mental level. So, it becomes possible to achieve a sense of peace and happiness within ourselves, irrespective of external conditions.

Having said that, of course it is very important to maintain good physical health, which is also relevant to our overall wellbeing. We may enjoy optimal physical health of the body, however, if our mind is very stressed, disturbed or agitated, it may harm or adversely affect our body and consequently throw our physical health and wellbeing out of balance.

This shows that the causes of happiness on the mental level are more important than those on the physical level. By comparing the levels of the two factors for peace and happiness in our life – the internal or spiritual factors and the external or material factors – we may notice a serious deficiency in our internal level of peace and happiness. That is why we should turn our mind to learning and practising meditation. So our focus in meditation is to develop the internal factors conducive for peace and happiness. Meditation also involves learning about ourselves and about our mind.

Geshe Shawo said that happiness begins with the lessening of desire for various objects. This is very true because if we reflect on this, we can recognise how a great deal of the frustration and unhappiness we experience is not so much to do with our immediate living conditions but more to do with a lack of satisfaction and contentment within our mind. As a result of this we are perpetually suffering and caught in unending demands and challenges throughout our life. As this great practitioner Shawo implied, we begin to find happiness as we begin to decrease desire. As long as there is desire there is no satisfaction. When an unfulfilled desire prevails, there is no happiness because desire makes us feel as if something is lacking and a sense of dissatisfaction arises, which in turn causes us stress.

We can consider this in the context of our own life situation. In our case, there is no real shortage of the basic things necessary to sustain our life and enjoy it. However, if we don't control our desirous mind, we may feel that we don't have enough, because when one desire is fulfilled, another one immediately arises, and another one after that. So as long as we are overpowered by desire, there is no way for us to find satisfaction.

Another great Indian master Ashvaghosha also said that there is no worse a sickness or disease than having a desire, which is essentially saying the same thing! It is not only in Buddhism that we repudiate desire and cultivate a sense of contentment, but the Christian tradition also emphasises the importance of a sense of contentment. So, all of this shows that if we are unable to control our mind and free it from the influence of desire, then no matter how extensive our achievements and success, we will lack a true sense of satisfaction and happiness.

In order to cultivate a sense of contentment, we need to change our way of thinking. The great Indian master Nagarjuna said that the purpose of wealth is to bring satisfaction to our mind, to ourselves. Of course, acquisition of wealth does not automatically bring satisfaction; rather satisfaction depends on whether we are mentally contented with the wealth acquired. If we enjoy good health or our living conditions are sufficient, then we have a good reason to be contented with what we have and feel grateful. We need to learn to say that everything, such as our health, possession of wealth and friends etc., is good enough. Not only are we saying this, but in fact mentally contenting ourselves with whatever we possess has a positive impact on our experiences. The moment we acknowledge and feel grateful in our mind that we have everything we need such as wealth, possessions and friends, we will find peace and contentment.

Meditation practice helps us to transform our way of thinking, and through it enhance a sense of peace and happiness from within. When we engage in meditation practice we are resting our mind on a chosen object which brings peace and calmness and it is important we try to do it on a regular basis. The length of the time we partake in this doesn't matter! It could be only for one or two minutes, but it is of great benefit in terms of giving us the opportunity for sufficient reflection and the means to create the causes for peace and happiness within ourselves.

Unless we control our desirous mind, we cannot find satisfaction, no matter how much we achieve in our life. Without desire being brought under control, we may be always wanting more and more and the best of the best. Therefore when we talk about true sense of satisfaction and happiness, one important cause is to mentally cultivate a sense of less desire and contentment. In relation to this, somebody commented to me that there must be a very close connection between Buddhism and Christianity because he thinks that they probably are the only two religions that have a system of monasticism or orders of monks and nuns hood. In the monastic system there is a great emphasis placed on living a very simple and contented life and this frees a lot of time which

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enables the members to focus on pursuing spiritual practice.

We can be inspired by just observing how some Christian practitioners lead their lives. Some nuns dedicate their entire life to serving other beings and the community at large and when we look into their individual lives, they do not really possess anything which is a great source of inspiration.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama once said that he heard about a Spanish monk who did a retreat for six years and His Holiness said, 'I actually took the opportunity to meet him!'. This monk just lived on nothing else but dry bread for six years which was enough to satisfy his life, thus illustrating his practice of simplicity and contentment. When His Holiness asked him about the nature of his practice and meditation, he said that he focused on developing love. Actually, the moment he said the word 'love' he expressed a strong sense of love and emotion on his face.

His Holiness also found that moment very touching and inspiring. Christian practitioners draw their inspiration of developing loving kindness in their faith in Almighty God. It is in their faith in God that they find the inspiration to practice and to develop living a life of contentment and simplicity. They fully dedicate their life to other beings and from that source, they are also able to totally eliminate self-centeredness. It is because of all these practical benefits from cultivating faith in God, that His Holiness has a great respect and admiration for all the non-atheist schools of faith.

It is obvious that some Christian practitioners have completely overcome the self-cherishing mind because internally, their only concern is for the welfare of other beings. So as previously said, these practitioners manage to overcome the self-cherishing mind because of their belief and faith in Almighty God, and it is for this reason that His Holiness the Dalai Lama has great admiration for the Christian faith. One very eminent Christian leader even commented to His Holiness: "you seem like a true Christian ... a good Christian!". As a follower of His Holiness and also from my own observation of Christianity, I also greatly respect and admire all other religions'.

The previous occupant of Tara Institute was The Daughters of Charity, an order of nuns with a mission for the disadvantaged. When we first moved here I became a good friend of nuns who moved across the road. I became particularly close to one nun, Sister Maeve, who shared with me a lot about her life. She travelled a lot to different countries and used to write to me and also meet me when she returned. We often shared tea and visits to each others places. I really had great admiration and respect for her practice and whole-hearted dedication to serve those in need.

When the nuns were living here and looking after about one hundred underprivileged children, they didn't have a heater and the living facilities were very basic, and my friend nun did a lot to take care of those children. At one stage she also travelled to India and was involved in taking care of many poor and homeless children. she also did some missionary work in South America in the

middle of a forest providing shelter for thousands of disadvantaged there too.

Before we begin our meditation practice we should remind ourselves of the benefits of engaging in meditation practice. We need to ensure that we feel positive and enthusiastic about our approach to the meditation. Meditation helps us direct our mind fully inward, as a result of which we can feel our mind at rest, experience happiness, positive energy, confidence, and hope from within. On the other hand, if our mind is too distracted or preoccupied with various disturbing thoughts and is wandering off in all directions, then as a result we may feel depressed, having low self-worth, or too stressed, anxious, confused, and unhappy. I think sometimes people suffer depression as a result of lacking control or discipline over their mind. To put in other way depression can be purely self, or mentally created disease.

However in meditation practice we overcome mental distraction and direct the entire focus and energy of our mind onto a single object of our choice and maintain concentration on that. As a result, meditation practice brings in more courage and motivation to do things and so forth.

As we all know our mind doesn't have the natural tendency to just to sit; rather it is more habituated to going after various objects. This shows that we need to engage in meditation practice which is to train our mind to get used to sitting. Through meditation practice we can tame our mind so that it functions under our command - to be able to make it just sit when we want it to sit. This is to say that wherever we want to rest our body but we can be sure that our mind is also at rest. For example if we relax on a chair at home, we know that our body is resting on the chair but if we are familiar with the meditation practice we can also make sure that our mind is relaxing at the same time. Our mind will relax, the moment we cease all thought processes, and put a brake on wandering thoughts. What we need is the total sense of relaxation which happens when both our mind and body are resting at the same time. Sometimes it may be effective in terms of therapeutic effect, or as part of our mind training to we talk to our mind. When we decide to rest at home we should tell the mind 'I'm staying home, so you should also stay home with me, and please go out and leave me alone at home.'

You might find it a bit abnormal to hear from me that you should have a dialogue with your mind as way of disciplining the mind rather than teaching you about philosophy by using various jargon words. I prefer to use simple words and keep things simple but relevant to your life. I say to you to talk with your mind, and see how you can bring your mind closer to you. In one way perhaps you will find it easier to develop closer relationship with your mind than developing a relationship with another person who makes their own decisions and has their own life to live. Whereas if you say to your mind, 'I'm staying home and please, I also want you to stay with me' there is more chance that your mind will listen to you than asking your friend to stay with you! *[laughter]* Furthermore, when we talk about building a relationship with the mind you have heard frequently from me how our best and

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most reliable inner friend would be to cultivate in our mind, love and compassion for other beings

Through the meditation practice we cultivate peacefulness and happiness within our mind. The term for 'peace' in Tibetan is *shiwa* meaning pacification of distraction. Therefore, peace arises from meditation because in meditation we are pacifying the mental distractions which are the source of various disturbing states of mind or emotions. When the distractions are all pacified then naturally will experience happiness, so therefore meditation enhances peace and happiness within us. Even though it is currently out of our reach to experience everlasting sense of peace and happiness, at least when we meditate and when we are able to rest our mind, we can temporarily prevent the manifestation of the mental distractions and as a result of that, we can experience some peace and happiness .

With this in mind we can now begin the meditation practice, so please make yourself comfortable in your sitting posture. If there are any outer distractions, you should try to get rid of them and allow your mind to completely rest within yourself. Following this you need to gently focus the mind on the breathing and then as much as possible, ensure your full focus on the incoming and outgoing breath.

*[Meditation]*

We can now chant the Buddha's mantra, so make sure your mind is directed inward and then as we chant the mantra, direct your mental attention to the sound of the mantra without being distracted by any other objects.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed by Kim Foon Looi  
Edit 1 by Bernii Wright  
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Edited Version  
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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཇུག་ལམ་དེའི་འབྲིང་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

25 July 2018

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Please make sure that you are in a comfortable sitting posture and that your body is fully relaxed. Then reflect upon this passage by Lama Tsongkhapa,

If your mental attitude is positive, then what follows after will it be also positive.

If your mental attitude is negative, then what follows after will it be also negative.

Hence, everything depends upon your mind,

So make a consistent effort in cultivating positive mental attitude.

This passage shows us the source of happiness and suffering. It indicates that the happiness we experience is derived from a virtuous, white, or positive actions, whilst the unhappiness we experience is derived from black or negative actions.

Generally, our mind can have three different attitudes—positive, negative or neutral. However, this passage by Lama Tsongkhapa focuses only on the positive and negative states of mind: it says that if we cultivate a positive state of mind, then the path which follows will be positive, whereas, if we cultivate a negative state of mind, then the path which follows will be negative too.

We mentioned positive and negative actions. How do we define these? We can define these two from the point of view of their results. Positive or virtuous actions are those actions which have the capacity to bring about happiness and joy, while negative or non-virtuous actions which have the capacity to bring about unhappiness and dissatisfaction. If we reflect on the meaning of virtue and non-virtue from this perspective, we get some idea of what actions we should adopt and what actions we should avoid in our everyday lives. Hence, this reflection serves as a guide for our life.

When we observe some people's conduct and ethical behaviour, we will notice certain behaviours which bring them suffering and unhappiness. Those behaviours are inappropriate, negative and destructive in the eyes of others too. Whereas other behaviours are admirable, positive and beneficial for them and also for others. They bring joy and happiness to them and to those around them. The main cause of our actions has more to do with what lies within us than the external world and conditions. That is what we understand from the passage from Lama Tsongkhapa. The main source of feelings of happiness or unhappiness is our own state of mind. Hence, there is the causal link or connection between our actions and thoughts. The passage states that wholesome actions stem from a positive mental attitude or virtuous state of mind whilst negative and destructive actions stem from a negative state of mind.

With this understanding we discover that practices relating to transforming our mind are the most effective and beneficial practices that will bring benefit our life and the lives of those close to us. Cultivating loving kindness and

caring thoughts towards others develops and enhances positive states of mind and diminishes negative states of mind. Not only does cultivating loving kindness and warm heartedness bring about a positive transformation in our mind, but it is also of tremendous benefit to ourselves and others. In fact, a positive state of mind serves as the true refuge, protection and saviour for us.

In terms of the actual practice, we have to begin showing a positive mental attitude towards those closest to us; those we interact with in our daily lives. Practising and cultivating loving kindness and thoughts of benefitting others on a daily basis, while preventing hostile and harmful thoughts, brings immediate benefit to us and those close to us. We don't have to wait for these benefits in the future. As well as we don't have to wait for the time to practise, we can practice it right now of extending benefits to loved ones and even to those distant from us.

If we check the reality of our life situation, we can understand the importance of being friendly, kind and positive to other people. Our situation is that we live a life which is a part of society and our well being is very much dependent upon our relationships with others. Therefore, it is important to be in harmony with those we interact with in our everyday life and be more considerate of them too. I am not saying that we are unaware of doing this. But we need to focus and think about the best way to interact and communicate and build relationships with others. Taking this into account, we can understand the benefits of cultivating a positive mental attitude. As we understand from the passage from lama Tsongkhapa, all our actions are a reflection of our internal mental attitude. We can see that by focusing within and making an effort to cultivate a positive state of mind, we can improve our interaction and relationship with the outside world. This will help us to overcome stress and tension in our relationships. If we maintain a positive mental attitude, we will develop harmonious relationships with others in which we can enjoy our interactions with them such as having a cup of tea or a meal together, a good spirit of atmosphere without any tension or conflict. So we understand that our actions are influenced by our state of mind, and a positive mental attitude truly brings us peace and happiness. In fact, peace and happiness that derives from the mind or from within us is totally reliable and unending, whereas, external objects such as wealth etc., which appear to be a source of happiness is unreliable, and there is no guarantee that it will bring us satisfaction and peace.

Hearing all this from me, you may think it all sounds true but perhaps you are also thinking it is easier said than done. If we think that this teaching is too difficult to put into practice, it indicates our weakness in bringing our mind under control and how far we are away from releasing our mind from the grip of mental afflictions. To a great extent, we experience a lot of frustration because of the lack of control over our mind. There are so many instances in which we have no choice but to fall under the influence of afflictive emotions. Even if we want to be really caring, friendly and of benefit to others, we cause harm to them and sometimes even our acts of good intention, instead of benefiting them somehow end up as being harmful.

Of course, there's no doubt we all want to be at peace and enjoy happiness but there are moments in which we cannot be at peace. Therefore, it is important to investigate the main cause of this and why we are unable to achieve what we want to achieve despite our effort and success. If we look

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into it, then we will understand that the main cause is mental afflictions; some form of negative and destructive emotion that is controlling our thoughts and deeds. We need to think about this. If we think we can observe that in order to find more peace and happiness and to be a better person, we need to recognise that we must abandon negative thoughts and deeds, and the fact that the main source of all the negative thoughts and deeds is within us. Then we investigate how to overcome them.

When we look at the influence of a negative state of mind, the mental delusions and distractions, we can note that it can be very overwhelming for our mind. Therefore, we need to practise meditation because engaging in meditation is the only effective means of counteracting mental delusions. In meditation practice, we need to bring our whole attention, focus and energy inwards. For example, as we engage in meditation practice, we have to overcome mental distractions and slowly fix the mind on the given object. It is also important to note here that meditation practice is of great benefit only if we understand its purpose as being to counteract, challenge and overpower the mental delusions. When we have this as a set goal of our meditation, we will reap more benefits. If instead of this, we simply see meditation practice as just sitting and experiencing stillness, then it may provide some peace and relaxation while we are practising, but beyond that there's no benefit.

It is very beneficial to give thought to understanding our own situation. For example, when we are mentally stressed and disturbed we can be emotionally unstable and agitated. We cannot think or do things properly. As a result, we suffer. In this situation, if we think about it, we can identify the cause of the turmoil and mental disturbance that we are experiencing. In a similar way, based on understanding of our own situation, we can understand the actual cause when a friend is agitated and unstable, saying and doing things in an abnormal way. We can recognise and relate the actual cause to their mind, that there's something inside disturbing and bothering them.

There's a Tibetan expression in which we use the word, *nying-je* which literally means what a pity! But it's more a sense of empathy. Empathy will arise when we recognise the suffering and the cause of the suffering that the other person is afflicted with. When we see the true cause, we can easily feel empathy. In this way, it will not affect us and make us react. The key point is how important it is to apply meditation practice; to understand that the whole point of the meditation is to transform our mind and get rid of the influence of mental afflictions. In this way, meditation practice not only benefits us while we are practising but also afterwards when we engage with the outside world. When we encounter situations and circumstances, meditation practice will have an impact. It will influence us and help us to understand and look at situations from a different perspective.

We are also saying here that in practice we should begin by cultivating and developing love and compassion with those close to us. Sometimes we unnecessarily ask ourselves, 'where is the opportunity to practise this?' The perfect opportunity is when those close to us are facing difficulties in their lives. Then we apply our meditation practice—understanding that how when we are helpless, feeling miserable and suffering, our mind is completely overpowered by disturbing thoughts and mental afflictions, and we experience misery and suffering. In a similar way, we should try to understand, when our friend is

experiencing the same. In that way we can recognise and feel their situation, then generate love and compassion and a sense of empathy.

When we decide to help a friend, we should focus our mind how and the best way to help our friend in full consideration of the friend's best interest. For example, taking them out for a meal, listening to them or having a pleasant conversation. The important thing is to ensure we adopt the right mental attitude and show a genuine thought of helping our friend.

It is really awful to see some people how some people ignore, neglect and keep distant when their friend is undergoing hardship and in miserable situation. But that kind of mental attitude and action, though it may seem like we are protecting our own interest and comfort is not serving our purpose in the long run, because it is affecting our relationship with the friend. It is a matter of applying common sense – that's what we are discussing here. If we were in the same situation as our friend, much in need of tender love and support, and someone came to help and support us, we would cherish, appreciate and trust our friend even more. Hence, any help we give to our friends particularly in time of need would build, strengthen and develop more trust, and faith in our relationship.

Let me tell you this story of a Tibetan family that I knew; some of you might have heard it before. This Tibetan guy was married to a younger woman and they had two children. His wife was always nagging him and was very talkative and spoke harshly to him. He went through a difficult time and thought his wife would leave him because of their age difference and had lost faith in their relationship. So, he began to put more restraint on their spending and so forth in order to save for his future. Then, one day he had an accident in which he broke his leg. During that time his wife took very good care of him and actually was very gentle and caring for him. As a result, he regained his faith in her and started to even show his appreciation of his wife to others. This story clearly shows how much people appreciate and remember those who help them in difficult time.

Let's now do our usual breathing meditation. Check your posture and relax your body. Our object in this meditation is inhaling and exhaling as we breathe. Having brought the mind inwards, we focus on inhaling and exhaling without being distracted by other objects.

*(Pause for meditation)*

We will continue with the meditation by chanting the Buddha's mantra. As we chant we direct our focus to the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor  
Edit 1 by Katherine Boland  
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering  
Edited Version*

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and happiness whenever we face any unfavourable external conditions.

I quite often share with others my experience in maintaining peace and happiness within my mind, even in the face of difficult external conditions. Even though we cannot prevent or overcome all the unfavourable external conditions, we can through our practice protect our inner peace and happiness from being harmed or affected.

I know of one Indian woman who used to come to teachings, and sometimes after teachings we'd go out for tea. On one such occasion she asked me, 'Geshe-la, what is your secret of living a happy and peaceful life?'. I began to talk to her a bit about my life story, how I lost my country and had to leave my family behind etc., and then suddenly she said, 'I know, the answer is you have no attachment'. I thought that was a very smart answer, clearly exemplifying the genius of the Indian brain.

Another emphasis that I have always been putting into my talks on meditation is to apply the meditation to maintain peace and happiness within our mind. This is extremely important. To maintain and effectively protect our inner peace and happiness we need to apply a meditation practice. A meditation practice is very important in order for us to enjoy sustainable peace and happiness, and to inwardly have some sort of resistance so that we are not always vulnerable to the continuous changing conditions and circumstances of life.

However, when we let our ability to maintain our inner peace and control our mind slide, then how easily those difficult external causes and conditions can overwhelm us. It is so easy to be influenced by external causes; we can completely lose ourselves. We can easily get completely depressed. Some external situations result in us losing our interest and motivation, so much so that we cannot enjoy our life. We might find it difficult to even go to sleep or go out to eat; sometimes nothing helps. When we are very disturbed and agitated, we can clearly see how in that situation all external things fail to help us overcome these problems. So here we can see that the only thing that truly benefits us is learning meditation practice and integrating it into our life and getting used to it.

We are going to do our usual breathing meditation practice. In this meditation we don't need a lot of knowledge or to have to think about the topic or the reason for the topic. The meditation is simply just to direct our mind onto the object, on our breath. And of course, in order to do that, first of all we need to get rid of all our thoughts, like the very disturbing thoughts that have filled our mind. But the reality is that sometimes it is not always easy to get rid of all these disturbing thoughts. So we need to understand how those thoughts arise, and then how these different thoughts have an effect on our emotions, whether they are pleasant or unpleasant.

Generally speaking, in our case, lots of these thoughts are all related to our mind or consciousness, and its contact, mainly with the five sense objects, such as visual form, sound, smell, taste and touch. We experience the contact of our subjective mind and its object. For example, if you take the subjective mind or subjective consciousness as our visual eyesight or eye consciousness which perceives a form. When it has contact with an attractive form, desire arises, and contact with unpleasant form leads to aversion arising. So, depending on our mental contact with and perception of various external sense objects we generate various emotions,

which shape our experiences. If we cut the contact of our mind with an object, then we are getting rid of that particular state of mind or thought. So we can see how a meditation practice works in terms of disciplining our mind by fixing it on a specific object, and thereby preventing various disturbing thoughts from arising.

If we observe our state of mind we can see that when it is occupied on a negative object, we experience disturbances within us. So if we want to get rid of a particular state of mind, then one way is to divert our mind to a different object. However if, instead of trying to discipline our mind from going after a negative object, we simply let the mind engage with the negative object, then the result is that the discomfort and internal turmoil will be intensified. So I often say, sometimes it is wise to forget certain things and thoughts that bring us unpleasant experiences. I remember in my case, not so much now but in my young age, I suffered because of not being able to forget certain things and events. I can recall when I was young I found it extremely painful whenever I had to depart from my mother after spending some time with her. I just missed my mother a lot and suffered because I could not take her off my mind. Looking back, one of the main reasons why I found it so hard to leave her was because she loved me and looked after me so well that I was emotionally attached to her. I suffered because I could not emotionally cope well from being separated from her. However, the separation didn't affect me afterwards, as I got on with my life. Even if I thought about my mother, I didn't have difficulties. So in the same way, sometimes in our life, when things are going well and suddenly that changes, then we find it very difficult to cope with.

Some people may say, they don't have such problems, but in fact when they face a really testing situation, they realise that they are internally not strong enough and that they do have a problem.

Whatever we do in life, we need to be clear about our purpose or reason for doing it. When we engage in meditation practice, we have to recognise very clearly its purpose and benefits. So that is why it is good to discuss and think about the benefits of meditation before we begin our meditation.

Now let's begin the breathing meditation. Relax yourself and try to get rid of all the external thoughts so that the mind can rest inwards. Then breathe in and out, trying to direct the focus of the mind on the inhaling and exhaling of the breath.

*(Meditation)*

We continue the meditation by chanting the Buddha's mantra, and as we begin the chanting make sure that you keep the mind inward and try to use the sound of the mantra as the focus for the mind

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo*

*Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena*

*Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering*

*Edited Version*

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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

8 August 2018

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Please make yourself comfortable and relax your body and mind in preparation for meditation.

We all want to develop ourselves in terms of acquiring positive qualities and getting rid of negative ones. So, we should think of how meditation or spirituality can benefit us with respect to educating us about the good qualities we need to develop and the negativities that we need to eliminate.

There are many ways of integrating meditation into our life. Meditation practice enables us to recognise that there are desirable, positive, and constructive traits within us which bring happiness both to ourselves and others, as well as undesirable, negative and destructive traits which bring suffering and problems to ourselves and others. On the basis of this understanding we will know what to practise and abandon in everyday life, in order to enhance positive qualities and eliminate negativities.

As human beings we all possess a good human nature and intelligence. Meditation can help us to recognise these good human qualities and utilise them for the benefit of ourselves and others. Through meditation practice as we become more self-aware, we can learn that how sometimes, intentionally or unintentionally, we create negativities such as hurting those who are close to us and then feel bad and remorseful afterward. Moreover, we can clearly relate the main cause of negativities to our mind to impulses and afflictive emotions that serve a driving force for us to do these negative actions. We can see this very clearly in our meditation when we pay more attention to what is going on inside us than outside. Once we see that when our mind is overpowered by afflictive emotions whatever actions we undertake will become negative and destructive, and as a result we cause harm and damage to those around us, we will understand that we need to correct our mind in order to correct our deeds. As we look for an effective means of transforming our mind, we can see that meditation practice is the only true means to transform our mind, and that meditation is the best tool utilising our own human emotional intelligence in order to eliminate negative thoughts and develop positive mental attitudes.

Meditation makes us more aware of what is going on in our mind. It gives us an opportunity to observe our thoughts and to be discriminating. Instead of blindly following our mental impulses or simply being overruled by our mind, we need to apply meditation, and observe our mental impulses – what actions or direction they are leading us to follow and the end result. In this way we can decide what to do and do it to achieve the best outcomes for others and us.

Whether or not our actions will have harmful or beneficial consequences depends to a large extent on what our motivation is. By using our intelligence, we can recognise that sometimes there are some actions which may look beneficial in the very short term, but in the long term they bring much harm and no benefit at all. So, obviously such actions are not worth undertaking. Meditation helps us to use this ability to discriminate.

Meditation practice has a great potential to benefit ourselves and others. Through it we can improve the quality of our life as well as extend benefit to others. At least we hope that through meditation or spirituality we are able to prevent harmful actions that bring suffering to others and become more aware of the cause and effect of the occurrence of things and events. The main reason we find it difficult to correct our actions and to change our way of thinking is because of the overwhelming influence of negative states of mind, or mental afflictions. We need to be aware of the fact that when our mind is filled with strong afflictions such as hatred or anger, any actions undertaken can be really unwise and harmful to ourselves and to others. Thinking of overcoming mental afflictions like anger is the most effective means of really understanding mind training, and for that we need to engage in meditation practice. Meditation practice helps us gain more control over our mind. We may not be able to prevent anger from arising, with our spiritual practice at least we can become aware of it when it does arise and recognise it as being negative and destructive. One way to overcome it is directing our mind to the nature of anger itself, rather than reacting to it or pondering over the object of anger. By doing this we will see that anger losing its force and diminishing by itself. In this way meditation practice helps us to enhance the peace and clarity in our mind.

We can see through our meditation practice that thoughts and actions that bring harm to others also bring harm to us. Whereas thoughts and actions that bring benefit to others bring benefit to us as well.

Bearing in mind that what we are trying to achieve through meditation practice is the transformation of our mind, our meditation is to free our mind from the influence or dominance of mental afflictions. When we look at the causes of negativities, whether in our thought, speech, or bodily actions, they all stem from mental afflictions, which overpower our mind. If we overcome the presence of those mental afflictions in our mind we then bring about a positive transformation within ourselves. When this happens then naturally the actions that we manifest through the three doors of body, speech and mind, will be more beneficial and positive.

With this in mind we will now do a short breathing meditation. When we meditate, we use two main tools.

Mindfulness is the power of memory and alertness or awareness. In order to apply these, make yourself very comfortable and relaxed. Try to gently calm your mind down by overcoming all external distractions, so that your mind is fully brought within yourself. Applying mindfulness or memory means remembering the object of your meditation. The object here is your incoming and outgoing breath. Keep your mind on the inhalation and

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exhalation in such a way that it stays on the breath with full attention, and no part of your mind drifts towards any other object or outer distraction. You must use your memory to hold the mind on the object and prevent distractions. If someone is really very hungry the thought of food is always present in their mind. They cannot avoid that thought. Mindfulness or memory has to be applied in the same manner during meditation. It is used to hold the mind on the object.

We apply alertness or awareness to check if the mind stays on or leaves the object. Using this tool, if the mind doesn't stay on the object you will immediately become aware of that and bring it back onto the object. In meditation you need to be very vigilant and alert, so that even when the mind is about to stray, you will be alerted and then able to prevent the mind from being distracted. In this way you place your mind on the object. If you lose the object, simply bring the mind back.

Here the object is the inhalation and exhalation of the breath. For the next few minutes, try to place the mind only just on the breath, and apply mindfulness and awareness to that.

*(Pause for meditation)*

Now we are going to chant Buddha's mantra. We will continue the meditation, but switch the focus of the mind to the sound of the mantra. So again, make sure that the mind is not distracted by any other object but just focus on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA

That is all for tonight. If anyone has a question, we have time for one or two.

Question: Geshe-la, what is the best thing to do if you have a sense of regret?

Along with the sense of regret what is also important is to generate a resolution not to repeat whatever wrong action you have done in the past. It is also important when such a regret arises to recognise that whatever has happened in the past has already gone, and you can't alter that. However, you can learn from the past experiences. If the past action was bad, then along with feeling remorse you should feel more motivated and determined to not repeat the same action. The positive aspect of feeling regret is to recognise and acknowledge what you did in the past is wrong. This sense of regret must be sincere and arise from the depth of your heart so that you grow as stronger person who is clearer about what is right and wrong. Of course, if you find this sense of regret very disturbing and getting in the way of doing the things that you need to do, then may be you should try to redirect your mind to something else, or try to do something to forget about the past.

In Buddhist terminology we use the sense of regret in the context of regretting past deeds. From this point of view, regret can be virtuous or non-virtuous, for example, regretting the good things that you have done in the past by thinking, "I should not have done that", is considered non-virtuous, whereas regretting misdeeds is virtuous.

In fact, in one of Vasubandhu's works there is a section on regret where he said that regret can be virtuous, non-virtuous or neutral, and there some debates about this.

When we get together we create actions, which have benefits both ways. It brings me joy and benefits me when you listen to the teachings with good attention and great interest. Likewise, as I try to teach with good intentions and with pleasant physical gestures, hopefully you get some benefit and joy. So, we all derive some benefit from gathering together here. I knew one lady who at one occasion had a cup of tea with me after a teaching. She confessed to me that she she found it difficult to understand the teachings which however she loved my smile and bodily gestures and that's the main reason she attended the teachings. Maybe some of you also have been coming for the same reason.

Thank you for paying very good attention to the teaching.

*Transcribed by Kim Foon Looi*

*Edit 1 by Carla Betros*

*Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering*

*Edited Version*

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compassion, and how it can be a source of lasting peace and happiness for all beings including ourselves. When we talk about changing society and changing people in the world, it all starts from our own self. If we cultivate love and compassion and we engage in this act of benefitting others, then that inspires others to do the same. This is how we can share and promote love and compassion throughout the world.

Meditation practice should not be separated from how we live our lives, rather it should be closely interwoven with our lives and that's how it can make a difference to our lives. I consider meditation practice as a means to produce a good person, a good human being, a calm person, a good-natured person. In particular, the meditation on love and compassion is an indispensable tool for developing these good qualities as a human being. In such a positive way, this love and compassion can transform us, and also it effectively prevents a lot of suffering such as suffering because of loneliness, a sense of rejection and helplessness etc. Many friends, helpers and admirers always surround a loving and compassionate person.

On the other hand, nobody would trust or want to be a friend of a selfish person who lacks a sense of care and consideration for others and who always focused on their own self-interest. If he or she faces difficulties, or is in need of help, no one will want to support them. So without cultivating and nurturing love and compassion for others, then our own life will become so miserable, so lonely and empty.

Looking into our relationships, if there are some elements of love and compassion in the relationship, then there is a great deal of mutual benefit. I can categorically say that in a relationship between two partners, love and compassion is never a cause of conflict and tension! Rather the relationship breakdown and problems in it arise as love and compassion between the two parties begins to diminish. So whether we talk of individual lasting peace and happiness or we talk of living with other people, the most important factor for peace and happiness is to bring love and compassion into the relationship.

You can see even when animals like dogs and cats show love to each other, they become very close friends. This all shows when someone shows love to others then they don't feel any threat to their life, but they feel very safe and enjoy each other companionship. It is the nature of all living creatures to want to be close to beings who show them love. When we show love to animals, they react, and respond with the same love and friendship; they know how to acknowledge and appreciate someone who shows them love and compassion.

I once he saw on a Channel Ten TV show, a doctor who was taking good care of a little lamb. Eventually he tried to free it so it could go its own way, but the lamb kept coming back and began to jump up and down in a playful manner, hoping the man would to keep it. So if you look around you can see the effect of love and compassion and what it can do to others. It is amazing how it has the power to make other beings feel so peaceful and so safe and protected.

Another time I saw a man who was close to a lion. On one occasion as part of their playful game the lion opened his mouth wide, and the man stuck his head inside. Can you imagine the trust in their relationship? We as human beings are supposed to be more intelligent and have more of a sense in knowing who is benefitting and who is harming us. We can see the benefit of love in building trust, harmony and stability in our existing relationships, bridging any gap in our relationships and building new relationships.

So at this point we better begin the meditation because if I continue talking as usual, then one thing leads to another, and something else comes out from that topic and it goes on and on. So we will just stop here and do the meditation.

The meditation is just on breathing. We'll do this for a short time. Just begin with fully relaxing your body again; feel comfortable and try to get rid of distracting thoughts completely out of your mind. In this way you can direct your complete mental attention just on the incoming and outgoing breath. And as much as possible during this short meditation, keep your mind on the inhaling and exhaling of the breath. If you get distracted, then just keep bringing the mind back to the inhaling and exhaling.

Now we will chant the Buddha's mantra, again making sure you keep the mind inward and direct your focus on the sound of the mantra without being distracted by any other object.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed by Kim Foon Looi  
Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena  
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Edited Version  
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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཕམ་ལུ་ལམ་རིམ་འབྲིང་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

22 August 2018

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As much as possible try to fully relax your body and feel comfortable, and at the same time try to find a very relaxed, joyful and happy state of mind.

When we engage in meditation practice, and also in everyday life, we have to not only think of our physical peace and happiness, but also of the importance of having or experiencing, a very clear, happy, calm and peaceful state of mind.

It's important to think over and over again about how important it is to always have a very peaceful and happy state of mind present within oneself, like our best companion.

Having recognised the benefit of cultivating or possessing a very peaceful happy state of mind, one should then also always have a thought or some sort of determination or pledge, that 'I must maintain, and safeguard this state of mind, and never be separated from it'.

Indeed, this positive, clear and joyful state of mind within us should be recognised as a friend from within, an inner friend. If we think about the value and the reliability of this inner friend compared with any outer friends we have, then we can notice that its benefits are far greater. By having this inner friend, we can live a happy and self-sufficient life even if we don't have any outer friends to lean on for support, or even if we face adverse situations. Besides, we won't feel a sense of isolation, and are not so prone to suffer if our friends dump us. However, without having this inner friend, then sometimes even if we have many friends, we feel we don't have enough and we feel lonely. Also if you are separated from or lose those outer friends, it will bring much suffering and sometimes it even becomes a major disaster.

So throughout our life we will find that the most beneficial and reliable friend, providing us with unfailing support, is the one within ourselves. It is always there within us, but we need to activate, recognise and lean on it. It is a positive state of mind that ensures within us a stable peace and happiness, and an ability to think clearly, wisely and sensibly. When we take into account the fast-changing world that we live in, and how sometime things happen so quickly and so unpredictably including various adverse situations and circumstances, without something to rely upon from within ourselves in the form of positive thinking, and positive energy, our life can be too difficult a challenge to cope with. Sometimes we face situations where we don't get help from others, or there is nothing more they can do to help. and therefore, of all the things that we can possess in our life, we will find that the most valuable, reliable and beneficial one, is peace and happiness within us.

In short, we need to first realise that having a positive state of mind is something very important, and then we need to think about how we are going to protect that, and to prevent it from diminishing. We also need to think about and recognise obstacles and hindrances which can prevent us from having a positive state of mind, or which can destroy the positive state of mind which we already have within us.

The opposing force to our positive state of mind is mental afflictions or delusions, for example anger or jealousy. When these mental afflictions arise in our mind, we lose the positive state of mind within. Also, with our own experience, when we give rise to thoughts of anger or jealousy, we should ask ourselves, 'are we happy and at peace whilst under its influence?'. If we ask this question to ourselves, or to anyone else, no one will say that they are happy and at peace while their mind is occupied with mental afflictions.

The next question is how we are going to prevent mental afflictions from arising. When we think about this, we can see that one of the primary causes of mental afflictions is mental distraction. With mental distraction our mind is agitated, wandering out, and preoccupied with many thoughts; we have no peace and calmness within us, nor control over our mind and hence mental afflictions can easily arise.

Therefore, we need to overcome mental distraction, and the way to do so is, as much as possible, to try to maintain our mind within ourselves, rather than allowing our mind to always wander outside after the various external objects. If we make an effort to keep our mind within ourselves, this will have the effect of reducing mental distractions and thereby reduce the mental afflictions.

So in order to overcome mental afflictions we have to apply the meditation practice. And as we apply the meditation practice, we should have some understanding of how meditation works in terms of transforming our mind.

So what we are saying here is that first we need to understand the causes of the various states of mind. If an afflictive state of mind arises, for example anger, then we look at that state of mind because we have to understand how it arises, and under what causes and conditions it arises. What kind of mental outlook or perceptions of that object arise in our mind when we are under the influence of anger? We can recognise that anger arises when there is a strong feeling of aversion or hatred or animosity towards that object.

Therefore, in order to overcome that, we need to consider a completely opposite way of thinking, we need to cultivate an opposing mental outlook. So in meditation practice, we direct our mind to an object or thought which doesn't arouse anger or that has the opposite effect on our mental outlook than the kind of outlook we have with anger. In this way we have made it impossible for anger to arise through cultivating in our mind rather a pleasant or desirable mental outlook towards the object.

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To quote the great Kadampa master Geshe Langri Thangpa:

In my every action, I will watch my mind,  
And the moment destructive emotions arise,  
I will confront them strongly and avert them,  
Since they will hurt both me and others.

A way to prevent anger, or to counteract it, is to engage in the meditation practice whereby you try to divert or redirect your mind to an object or thought that doesn't cause anger to arise or opposes the mental attitude of anger. And you will notice that with effort, as you manage to settle your mind on that object, the anger will slowly diminish because it simply cannot co-exist with it.

This also shows that the anger is not really in the nature of the mind, because if something is in the nature of the mind, it cannot be separated from the mind. So the fact that there are moments when there is no anger in the mind shows that anger is not embedded in the very nature of the mind. This means that it's possible to overcome anger.

Likewise, in order to overcome any kind of mental affliction, you need to engage in a meditation practice that directly opposes and counteracts the corresponding mental afflictions. This is especially important if one's mind is strongly and overwhelmingly afflicted with certain mental afflictions or afflictive emotions. In that moment, or in that circumstance, it is important to make an effort, with full concentration, to engage in meditation, and to utilise all of one's intelligence to try to direct the mind away from that affliction. In this way, as we do this, we don't always have to fall prey to the mental afflictions; rather we can challenge them and win, and we can be on top of them.

As we always say, meditation practice is not just simply about focusing our mind on a particular object, but it should also help us to develop and enhance our knowledge and a greater sense of discernment. Basically, the term 'meditation' means 'to become familiar with', so when we think about this term in the context of our practice, it means that we aim our practice at familiarising our minds with a positive way of thinking, with a virtuous or a positive object.

This is the opposite to our state of mind which is under the influence of or is overpowered by mental afflictions. So there are tremendous benefits that follow from the practice of meditation. We were just saying how important it is to cultivate a positive state of mind, and then if we manage to protect or safeguard that, it can have great benefit for our entire life.

Whenever we engage in meditation practice we need to remember that the focus of the meditation is really to counteract mental afflictions, because if it doesn't counteract mental afflictions, then the meditation won't have much lasting benefit. So with this in mind, we can now do a short breathing meditation.

There are many people who have greatly benefitted from meditation practice, and some of those people are here. So people who get benefit from meditation don't necessarily have to be great meditators, but just ordinary

people who study meditation over a number of years, and integrate it into their lives.

There are many instances where people are afflicted with a serious physical illness, but they remain calm and even able to say they are happy and everything is OK despite their health conditions, because of integrating meditation into their lives. In fact, I was surprised to hear from some people I know, who are undergoing serious health problems, that they are very peaceful and happy inside their mind. These kinds of life stories should inspire us to do the practice more.

Now we will begin a short breathing meditation. So please sit in a comfortable posture, place your hands with the right over the left below the navel in a meditation posture, and then as much as possible try to gently calm the mind so that your mind is fully drawn inside, and try to get rid of all the thoughts of any external objects, especially try to overcome the influence of any mental afflictions.

Here, the object of meditation is the inhaling and exhaling of the breath. So after getting rid of all the distracting thoughts, we should rest or sit the mind on inhaling and exhaling. Just as our physical body touches certain objects so it can't move, it is also like that with your mind; when we fix our mind on the breathing, just stay there on the inhaling and exhaling of the breath without being distracted by any other objects.

*[Meditation]*

Now just make sure that you hold your mind inward and we will chant the Buddha's mantra. With the chanting, you direct your mental focus onto the sound of the mantra, rather than being distracted by any other object.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed by Bernii Wright  
Edit 1 by Robyn Ralton  
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Edited Version  
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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་འགྲུབ་པའི་བཀའ་སློབ་ལྷན་པའི་སྐུ་ལོ་།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

29 August 2018

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Relax and we will meditate together.

The aim in meditation is to develop a calm and a clear state of mind.

In meditation we direct our mind and focus on a specific object and in this way we consolidate our energy, concentration and attention within us. This practice is very effective for developing and enhancing a peaceful and happy state of mind.

We all have the same wish to have a state of mind that is peaceful, happy and joyful. Let's look into the benefit of having a peaceful, calm and happy state of mind. In general, our perception of things and events are more positive when we have within us a very peaceful and joyful state of mind, whereas it is more negative when our mind is disturbed and agitated. We can note that when our mind is peaceful and happy or when we are in good mood, the world and external objects appear to be wholesome, positive, friendly and desirable. If when our mind is disturbed, not peaceful or happy, or we are in bad mood, the world and things appear to be negative, unpleasant and horrible, as if everything including inanimate objects hates us and wants to annoy and upset us. This is something important to take note of.

This shows that to a great extent whether the external world and people appear to us as friendly or not, depends more on our own state of mind than is objectively the case. If we have a more peaceful and happy state of mind, we have a more positive and pleasant perspective of the outside world and events. If our mind is disturbed and lacking peace and happiness, then we have a more negative impression of the outside world. How we perceive things or people has more to do with our own mental projection than how things appear objectively. In fact, the way the whole world appears to our mind is almost conjured or constructed by our own thoughts, rather than reflecting the way things are in terms of their reality. For example, we can feel hatred and attachment for the same object. We hate the object when it appears to be undesirable, unpleasant and ugly, and then find it desirable, pleasant and attractive. His Holiness Dalai Lama commented that a finding of scientific research concluded that in 95% cases when people are angry, the object seems negative, but this is a 90% mental projection. The research looked at the cause of why an object of anger or hatred seems to be very undesirable and negative - whether the element of undesirability was something in the object or projected by the mind. However, there is no similar indication by percentage as to why the object seems positive when a person is

attached to the object i.e. whether it is more related to the object or the subjective mental projection.

When we experience strong, possessive desire the object appears to be very pleasant. If we look into our personal experience, especially our feelings towards those who are close, we see how they can fluctuate from attachment to hatred very quickly. It is not always the case that our acquaintances change their feelings towards us. Sometimes they remain the same person and have not changed their feelings towards us but because of our unnecessary suspicion and mental projection they appear as being untrustworthy, unpleasant and annoying.

If we look into the cause of why disturbing thoughts bring negative thinking, we can see that the main cause is because our mind is too agitated or distracted and not under our control; it seems like a piece of paper in the wind, wandering about without any thought. When a certain thought arises a person might feel that the whole world is against them. He doesn't want to see other people, his self-esteem suffers, and he may even suffer from depression. We can recognise that this all derives from mental projection.

So, whenever we engage in meditation practice we should reflect upon the purpose of meditation, which is to calm our mind so that we are not misled and tormented by our own mind. The purpose of the practice is to bring about a state of mind that is peaceful, joyful, clear thinking and alert.

There is no question that we all want mental happiness. We also know that happiness, even on a mental level, depends on causes. We are also aware that if we want happiness we have to create the cause. In fact, our whole life is actually going around and around in pursuit of happiness and we are trying hard to achieve that.

If we ask ourselves what we think is the true cause of happiness, our answer is usually that happiness arises from external causes and conditions, such as making money etc. It is as if happiness is a consumer product. We have a preconception that more external wealth and successes more happiness we can have.

But then if we check those who are materially well off, all have happiness or more happiness, then they don't necessarily have more happiness. There are some people I know who do not particularly believe in religion or spiritual teachings, who despite their wealth and success are very unhappy, confused and frustrated with their lives. This means that accumulating material wealth does not necessarily bring happiness. So, we have to ask what other cause of happiness is missing?

Indeed, sometimes, we can see that those who have more wealth have more causes for mental distraction, worry and getting stressed. As discussed earlier if people are mentally very disturbed and stressed then, no matter how much wealth they possess they cannot be at peace and happy. They cannot have peace and happiness inside them because their increased wealth has become a source of increased attachment, pride, jealousy etc. Because of their wealth they look down on poor, are jealous of others who are richer than them and have a sense of competitiveness with those who equal to them.

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Of course, it is not necessary, but if we are not careful our wealth and material successes can become a source of more worries and restlessness and burden inside, rather than bringing more happiness, satisfaction and peace in our lives. In order to feel peace and live a satisfying life we have to overcome desire within our mind. If our desire remained unchallenged then no matter how much wealth we possess we will never be contented. Desire will make us work hard and suffer just for the sake of accumulating wealth; then having accumulated it, wealth makes us worry about safeguarding it, and protecting ourselves from losing it, not to mention the suffering of losing it at the end.

There are some people who even acknowledge the fact that their life seems to be more unhappy and less fulfilled now than in the past when they were not so wealthy. This confirms how, when there is no control over our thoughts, we can lose our peace and happiness to the point where even good external material conditions and successes don't bring any happiness. In fact they don't bring any added value to our lives.

So, what we understand from this is that when we talk of peace and happiness we are talking about some qualities within ourselves, and the only way to cultivate and develop it is through meditation practice and through achieving a calm state of mind.

There are a lot of benefits from integrating meditation in one's life. Even if you meditate for a very short period, like one or two minutes, you will experience some peace and happiness. Even that short moment is important for your wellbeing. It is good to include it on a daily basis. Regardless of the duration, if you do a little bit of meditation on a daily basis, you will find it very effective in terms of enhancing your peace and happiness. If we already have found some sort of peace and happiness it will help to safeguard it and not lose it or allow it to disintegrate. It can even help us to have a good night sleep which is an important cause for our wellbeing. To ensure a good nights' sleep, our mind must be calm and not overwhelmed by distracting thoughts. If we are mentally agitated and disturbed, we can't fall sleep, can we?

The benefits of meditation include an increased focus, clear thinking, peace and happiness. It also helps stabilise these positive qualities, to which we all aspire. When we have these qualities, it benefits not only ourselves, but also those around us. I try to put all my efforts into always trying to recognise the importance of having and sustaining a state of mind, which is clear, peaceful and happy. I can say that I have achieved some results and I am convinced that my practice of meditation actually works in terms of achieving and sustaining a peaceful state of mind.

Reminding ourselves of the benefits we can have through controlling our mind, and the faults or shortcomings that can arise inevitably if we do not control our mind, is the best way to motivate ourselves to meditate regularly. Keeping this mind, we will now do a breathing meditation for a short time. We will use the technique of directing our mind and mental attention fully on the incoming and outgoing breath.

We do this is by applying mindfulness, like a rope tying the mind to an object. As much as possible ensure your mental attention is just on the breath and not distracted by any other object. Now begin the meditation.

*[meditation]*

Continue keeping your focus inward and we will begin chanting the Buddha's mantra. However, now you direct your mental attention to the sound of the mantra without being distracted by any other object.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA  
So that's all for the teaching, but if anyone has a question, there is room for one question.

*Q. One of the ten non-virtuous actions is called covetousness, what does it mean?*

It is a type of attachment. When you go to shops you see an object that you desire and think 'I wish I could have that object'. The word 'desire' is not necessarily negative all the time, as you can have a positive desire. However, in our daily life we have desire or attachment to various objects. One psychologist categorised desire into three levels, small, middling and great, and made the remark that a small level of desire is not harmful to us. I like that idea.

Of course, it is not easy to overcome desire but making an effort over a period of time we can slowly minimise and overcome desire. Once I was having a chat with a girl who was a beginner and had an issue with desire. I advised her that her desire was very low level, so it was okay. She really appreciated that and said she felt much better. Later on, however she understood what I really meant when I said, 'it was okay to have a small desire'.

Covetousness can bring suffering at the shops especially if you don't have money. Covetousness is more to do with mentally craving for the object. At the shop you are visually attracted to various things and at the same time you mentally crave for those things. That is covetousness. When you get to home, your mind can be still craving for those things that you saw at the shop, so your mind is not really home because it is still out shopping. The more you crave, the more your mind is distracted and unhappy.

Tomorrow I get up happy, enjoy good harmony and a good mind. Good harmony makes you happy, makes you really happy. Good harmony creates a good mind. It is not outside. Monks are very, very poor, yet very, very happy. They are very harmonious and very happy.

Thank you

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo  
Edit 1 by Carla Betros  
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yourself with the object. However, when you begin the meditation, the object should not be out there, but rather it is something within yourself. It is important to understand that the object is within your mind. In Buddhist terminology, this is called a generic image, so whatever object you have out there, you have the generic image in your mind.

In meditation, when you direct your mind to focus on the object, it is not as though the mind is here and the object is there, with the mind gazing at and observing the object. Instead of this, it is important to direct the attention so that the mind is merged with or dissolved into the object, with no separation between the mind and the object.

This briefly explains the object that we use in the meditation practice. When placing your mind on the object, there are two very important tools to help maintain and sustain the meditation practice. One of these is mindfulness, which is more like the memory of the object. The other important tool is introspection, which is more like an awareness, the part of the mind that has the ability to watch the meditation. It is like a detective checking how your meditation practice is going.

The main obstacles which you will need to challenge and overcome are mental sinking and mental excitement. The indication of sinking is when our memory of the object is not clear or fades away. If the clarity in our mind and the focus on the object seems to be fuzzy, this is the arising of sinking, which we need to overcome. Excitement is regarded as a form of attachment, which distracts the mind from the meditation object, such as pleasurable or desirable objects. Therefore, during meditation, you will need to apply mindfulness and introspection to remedy sinking and excitement.

In order to make good progress, the great meditators advise beginners to make their meditation period session short, and have more sessions, so that they can look forward to doing the meditation practice again. The idea is to make the practice very effective, because whether you are doing well is not dependent on how long you have been sitting there doing your meditation practice, but you have to look at the quality and effectiveness of the practice. Your meditation is effective in whatever duration you practice if it helps you to counteract the faults of sinking and excitement. Even if the duration is a short period of one or two minutes, it is worthwhile, because if you apply it effectively, you will feel very positive about it. It is said that you should stop at the high point when you wish you could continue for longer.

On the other hand, you may sit in meditation but lack the proper application of mindfulness and introspection; in fact, when you find it difficult, you force yourself to stay there longer. This is the wrong approach because it becomes more like meditating on sinking and excitement. If you repeat this kind of meditation, then your mind will become habituated to these two faults which will arise when ever you sit in meditation. However, if you try to focus on overcoming the faults and making the session enjoyable rather than forcing yourself to do a long meditation, then after a month or two, you will notice that you will slowly be able to extend the meditation session to four or five minutes without much interruption

of sinking and excitement, so in this way you can make progress.

We will now do a very short breathing meditation. For a successful meditation practice, it is also very important to choose a suitable sitting posture, which you will find is very effective for the practice. Choose the right posture, then relax your body fully and gently try to overcome all distracting thoughts, letting the mind rest completely within yourself. Bring the mind inwards, through overcoming all outgoing thoughts. When you overcome and empty all the thoughts, you will find your mind focussed inwards, without any objects. It is said that it is good to let the mind remain in that state, without any objects of focus, but simply resting the mind inwards for a little while or to the point when you notice that the mind goes after an external object. At that point, you can begin the breathing meditation by directing the mind to inhaling and exhaling the breath.

*[Pause for single-pointed meditation]*

We will now chant the Buddha's mantra and continue to keep the mind inwards but redirect the focus to the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

This breathing meditation practice does not require us to think or study much about it as a meditation technique. It is said that using our own breathing as an object for the mind to focus on is effective in terms of cultivating an increased state of concentration. For example, in certain situations where you experience a strong thought of hatred and anger, this causes the mind to become very restless and disturbed. In that situation, if someone is advised to practise patience or to cultivate love and compassion, it may be very difficult and challenging. However, it is not that difficult to do the breathing meditation practice - you just have to focus on the breath, so you may find that this technique is effective in immediately calming down the mind.

There are various techniques for the breathing meditation. A popular one is to direct your mind to the inhaling and exhaling as you mentally count the breaths. One inhalation and one exhalation count as one round of breath. It is very important that your mental attention is placed completely on the breathing without any other objects distracting your focus, but that you direct the mind to focus single-pointedly on the inhaling and exhaling, as you mentally count the rounds of the breaths. It is said that after twenty-one rounds, you will see the results of completely resting the mind within yourself.

We will leave tonight's teaching here. There is time for one question.

*Student: Sometimes when I think of the Buddha in my head, I find there are flashes of light, which can dislodge the Buddha, because they are more lively. Is there a way to give Buddha more light?*

Normally what comes easily to our mind are those objects that our mind is familiar with. It is very obvious when our mind is used to certain objects, we will find that the objects keep occurring in our mind all the time. I had an old friend who did a long meditation, where he focused

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on a certain syllable at the navel. He did this so well that later whenever he meditated, this syllable kept appearing in his mind and sometimes it became an interruption to his meditation.

In order to cultivate concentration, it is generally advised that it is better to choose an object that you find easy and which is suitable for you to focus on.

Many years ago, I was in Kathmandu at the big Boudhanath Stupa at the same time as Lama Zopa Rinpoche. I clearly remember, at that time when I was meditating, there was a bright light that kept appearing in my mind. Later on, the same light kept coming back, however it's not there anymore.

Generally, we recommend the image of Lord Buddha. I am happy to hear that you are using the image of the Buddha for your meditation. There are some additional benefits for using this image.

For devoted Buddhists, the image of the Buddha is specifically recommended to use as an object to achieve single-pointed concentration and calm abiding.

It also has significance later on, especially in tantric practice when the meditator engages in deity yoga practice where you arise as the deity such as the image of the Buddha. Therefore, for Buddhists, utilising the image of the Buddha as an object to achieve calm abiding has a long-term benefit for the tantric practice.

As Buddhists, from your experience you can understand the added benefit when you focus on the image of the Buddha. If you can sustain the focus, it's not just achieving the concentration but there is also more benefit to it.

To summarise, as discussed earlier, the purpose of life is mental and physical happiness, which are most important for us, therefore the meditation that we do is to achieve that purpose, particularly the happiness on the level of our mind.

That is all for tonight, and I thank you all for attending.

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor  
Edit 1 by Ingrid Leibbrandt  
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering  
Edited Version*

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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཕམ་མཁའ་མ་རིམ་འབྲིང་བ་བཞུགས་མོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

12 September 2018

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As usual we begin with meditation.

Meditation practice is a means to train our mind. It is important that we recognise the benefits of training our mind, and also understand what we should be doing when we engage in meditation practice in terms of what we should be thinking and so forth.

Through meditation practice we train our mind in order to cultivate a good, positive state of mind or attitude. We want this positive mental attitude to supplement the great human intelligence that we already have within our great human brain. Although as human beings we are gifted with this great sense of discernment and intelligence we can enhance this intelligence with a positive mental attitude.

There's not much use in simply having this great intelligence and a great brain if it is not used in a meaningful way. Therefore, we need to have a positive and wholesome mental attitude so that we can direct our human intelligence to a more beneficial purpose.

If we investigate we will find that we quite often misuse our human intelligence to cause harm to other beings, so we can see how without the right state of mind, it can be easily misused for wrong purpose, in a destructive rather than beneficial way. On the other hand, if, on an everyday basis, we have within us a positive state of mind, then we will find that because of the force of this positive state of mind, there is more joy, more positive feelings and more happiness within us. When we have a positive state of mind, it has the benefit of maintaining clarity, clear thinking and some sort of sanity.

If we say meditation practice is effective in terms of cultivating and enhancing such a positive state of mind then we also have to understand how meditation actually brings this about, and conversely how, if we do practise meditation, we are not in a position to cultivate or maintain this positive state of mind. If we look into meditation practice, we find that it is a form of a mental discipline. We are disciplining our mind by, for example, placing the mind on a specific object, and the kind of object we introduce to the mind in the meditation practice is usually virtuous and positive.

In other words, we are pointing the mind in the right direction, which brings about personal benefit. Whereas if we don't apply meditation practice and simply let the mind just follow wandering thoughts then the mind can be so easily go the wrong direction and follow wrong objects. Therefore, meditation practice is a way of connecting our mind with the right direction, and the right kind of object.

When we engage in meditation practice, we are trying to redirect our mind from going after negative objects and the wrong direction towards positive objects and a positive direction. This is how, through meditation practice we bring about changes in our mind. In fact, we call meditation a spiritual practice or the Dharma. Etymologically the term 'Dharma' has the connotation of correcting, amending, changing or fabricating. So from that perspective, when we engage in meditation practice the literal meaning of Dharma really fits as meditation is indeed correcting or amending our way of thinking. The implication of course is that our mind needs to be corrected. What correction does our mind need? Normally, the mind is very much habituated with negative ways of thinking, and negative objects. However, in meditation we prevent that and then place the mind on a positive object. That is real meaning of Dharma - correcting, transforming, and changing the mind. Here the term Dharma refers to something that we need to practise.

From a wider perspective, the Sanskrit word 'dharma' also means that which holds its own identity, or nature, or characteristic. From that perspective, everything is dharma and there is nothing that is not included in that. From that perspective all the objects of knowledge are dharma. For example, this glass is dharma in the sense that it holds its own characteristics and identity. That makes it unique and distinctive from all other objects. That's why we can differentiate this glass from any other objects.

However, when we talk of the Dharma as something we put into practice and apply in our life we are talking about the practice where we focus the mind and remove all negative states of mind, replacing them with a positive state of mind. Sanskrit is one of the oldest languages and it is very rich in the sense that those who understand that language semantically also understand the actual contextual meaning of the words.

In order to appreciate the benefit of meditation practice, we should understand that how meditation deals with the very root of all our problems. For instance, if when your mood swings from happy to unhappy within a short period of time you investigate what changes have taken place in that short time you can note that when you feel very unhappy, your mind is very agitated and disturbed. So, you can clearly connect the cause of the mood change to your state of mind. When you are experiencing unhappiness, your mind is restless or very distracted, and perhaps filled with negative attitudes and thoughts, whereas when you were happy it was not like that. So from that perspective, we can understand that how beneficial meditation practice is, because it helps us to transform our mind and get rid of disturbing thoughts. Through this it enables us to gain control of our mind rather than allowing our mind to be overwhelmed by disturbing thoughts and mental afflictions.

From another perspective, unwanted experiences and unhappiness and are directly related to our own way of thinking. So, we have to understand that the only way to overcome this problem is to cultivate a different way of thinking. Even if someone else is trying to help nothing

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will happen until we personally do something to remove that way of thinking.

It is important to recognise that sometimes we tend to hold onto a certain thought as if it is very precious and trustworthy, even though it is the reason why we feel so agitated, tense or anxious. Through engaging in thought transforming meditation practice, the moment we cultivate a different way of thinking we will be healed from this unwanted and very painful state of mind. So from this perspective we can call meditation practice the best healing medicine for curing the real cause of illness within us.

We begin our meditation by choosing the sitting posture that is most comfortable and suitable for ourselves. Those of you who are familiar with the seven features of the sitting posture should try to adopt that posture. Then we should think of the true source of the unending suffering and misery we experience in life. The true cause lies within ourselves in the form of negative states of mind or thoughts.

We should recognise those thoughts and point to them saying, 'It is you who is the source of my continual suffering! I cannot find anything else other than that which causes my suffering'. Think of the excellent external conditions in your life. Think of how fortunate you are in having an abundance of food, drink and a comfortable home. Everything you want is there and yet there is continuous suffering. You cannot find external things that you can point out as a cause of suffering, but can you recognise suffering arising internally from the negative states of mind, so point yourself towards this negative state of mind that lies within yourself as the cause of suffering.

As you focus and direct your mind towards that negative state of mind, try to cultivate some sort of aversion towards it. Then say to yourself, 'I want to finish it off, and that's why I am engaging in this meditation practice'. In this practice you determine that you won't give a chance for these negative states of mind to take control of you for even a second. Develop this kind of determination to challenge and defeat this negative state of mind. With this determination and motivation, begin your meditation practice by fully resting the mind inwards, removing all mental and external distractions.

As the mind rests within you begin this meditation, simply direct the mind to inhaling and exhaling as an object of the mind. Remembering this point, we can now begin the meditation practice.

*[Meditation]*

If anyone has a question, please feel welcome to ask it.

*Question: If there is a wolf attacking a flock of sheep killing them and affecting the livelihood of the farmer, what should the farmer do with the wolf?*

The shepherd's job is to stop the wolf from attacking the herd. You also don't want to harm the wolf as well, so there is a moral dilemma. You can also raise question of what should you do if someone abuses a family member like your wife?

A student once asked another geshe, 'What if another person abuses my wife? What should I do? Should I fight back?'. When this geshe asked me for my opinion, I said that this is the time for you to support your loved ones. In this situation if you don't have the guts then you can't do much except run away or just do nothing. However, it is a normal human reaction to stand up to perpetrators of harm.

Of course, it is good to apply skills and tactics to defeat the enemy. Sometimes you simply have to show bravery, and that will be enough to discourage the enemy, and you don't have to do anything other than that. Normally an enemy will attack if you seem weak, whereas if you seem to be stronger that will discourage them. That is the way it works. If you they realise that you have a stronger and bigger weapon, then they will retreat.

Some of you might have heard this story in the past but when I was studying in Varanasi I was at a bookshop in the city with a close friend, who has now moved to America. At the shop there was an Indian boy who started to cause trouble and then slapped my friend, then more other Indians joined in and they started to steal my friend's wristwatch. I knew that it was a well known in the Indian community that Tibetans always carry a knife, so I moved my hand into my pocket as if I carried a knife and they all just ran away! My friend was pretty impressed my move and said, 'You are very clever!'

What is important is that we should not lose our compassion and our spiritual qualities. However spiritual practice doesn't necessarily mean that you have to run away in the face of challenges and difficulties. For example, if an enemy attacks you, sometimes we need to confront and challenge them. What is important is that you have to maintain your motivation, and a clear state of mind.

That was a good question. Is there another?

*Question: Following on from that, there is a very important ethical dilemma that lot of people have in Australia and elsewhere concerning the environment. Native creatures suffering as a result of changes to the environment. So there is a culling program and a split between those who support this and those who don't want to do any killing. How is that dilemma resolved?*

That is a very difficult question. From the Buddhist perspective you cannot really say one is right and one is wrong. There is a quotation from the Lord Buddha that is often used, 'I accept the norms of the conventional world and I do not go against those norms'. So from that perspective, we have to abide with what is agreed by the majority. But we can also make a judgement in terms of context, and in terms of the number of lives at stake by taking certain actions. It all depends on a case-by-case analysis to weigh which decision is the right decision.

From the individual person's perspective each one has the right, and freedom to do as much as possible is to prevent harm to other beings.

Of course, laws change depending on the type of government but overall everyone holds responsibility for the laws in the country. In bringing in a law we have to look not just in terms of current situation. It is more

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important is to look to the long-term future. This is a worldly decision. You have to look to the long-term future, and long-term benefit. Of course, this differs from spiritual practice in that this worldly view only relates to this life. As Buddhist practitioners the real long term is our many future lives. From that perspective, this life is very short.

Most religious teachings emphasise the ethics of refraining from, for example, adultery. This is not just based on the effects on this life but in the future as well. The spiritual practitioner has to look into the impact of their actions in the long term. In the immediate time frame some actions are very satisfying and bring pleasure but in the long term they may have a negative impact. In our everyday life, sometimes we not only engage in negative and destructive actions, but we actually rejoice in engaging or having engaged in those negative actions. That is very sad.

The previous owner of this place was the Christian order, the Daughters of Charity, and the room in that corner was a confessional, where the priest heard confessions of negative acts. We should not be rejoicing in our negative actions; we should be declaring and confessing and purifying them. Their belief is that if you commit any negative actions, you have to do confess and purify them. Buddhists also believe any negativity that we have accumulated can be purified. That is common to spiritual traditions.

Avoiding the en non-virtuous actions is also common to all religions. No killing, no stealing, no lying, no harsh speech, no gossiping – all religions are the same.

That was a good question, thank you.

If we look at Buddhist ethics, we can see the many exceptions the Lord Buddha made. In some situations, you are allowed to one thing, but in a different situation you are not allowed to do it. It also depends on the person. If the person is sick some things are allowed whereas if you are not sick, they are not allowed. Context and purpose, and a case-by-case analysis determines what is right and what is not right.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo*

*Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett*

*Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering*

*Edited Version*

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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་འགྲུབ་པའི་བཀའ་སློབ་ལྷན་པའི་སྐུ་འཕྲུལ་།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

19 September 2018

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We will begin with our usual meditation.

It's important that we begin the meditation with a proper motivation, ensuring there is a real interest and enthusiasm for engaging in meditation practice. Beginning a meditation with a positive state of mind as a motivation is very important, not only with meditation practice but also with any activities that we undertake in our everyday life. For instance, even when we have a casual conversation, if we do so with a positive and loving state of mind it makes a huge difference in terms of making our communication more effective and mutually beneficial. It is not just what we say to others that matters; the tone and the mental attitude that we adopt makes a huge difference. If our mental attitude is positive, then our interaction will have more positive impact.

Meditation practice is about learning about ourselves, our mind and living a more fulfilling life. Through meditation we can even make our everyday actions wiser, kinder and more compassionate. Meditation is about transforming our mind and bringing peace and happiness from within. Therefore, it is important whenever we engage in meditation practice that we direct our mind inward and ensure that we have a proper motivation and a clear recognition of why we are meditating and what we are trying to achieve.

Essentially, through meditation we are trying to achieve and enhance a more positive state of mind within us so that our actions of body, speech and mind are also positive. As all our actions derive from, or are presided over by some sort of driving thought, if this thought is positive then the actions that result from it will naturally also be positive. Likewise, if this presiding thought is negative, then any actions that arise from it will be negative too. With a positive motivation our actions will yield a beneficial result for ourselves as well as those who we interact with. If our motivation is filled with, for instance, hatred and anger towards others, then our actions will also have the same negative influence and as a result cause disturbance to both our mind and the minds of others.

Our actions directly affect us, and those around us, or with whom we interact. Thinking of this, and the fact that we all want happiness but not suffering, we should cultivate loving kindness or an altruistic mental attitude which is indeed the best frame of mind. If we cultivate and develop loving kindness then we will make a conscious effort in everyday life to try to prevent harm to others and benefit them through the actions of our three doors. Benefiting others benefits us too.

There are many inspirational people who are by nature very kind, calm, wise and patient. It is good for us to be around them and be inspired by them. We should observe how they maintain their happiness, calmness, consideration of and sensitivity to other peoples' needs etc. in all their interactions with others. Somehow this kindness is built into their

personality and is part of them. If we try to adopt their good nature and habituate ourselves to it through our spiritual practice, we can acquire the same qualities, and this will be of tremendous benefit for ourselves and for others.

We can remind ourselves of the following passage by Shantideva which indicates that we should check our thoughts before speaking or acting, and if we observe any faults or negativity in our thoughts we should remain silent and not act. This passage is a very practical piece of advice that we can apply in our everyday life. In this way, we will be able to prevent many actions which we may regret later.

The passage from Shantideva's *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* reads:

And when you feel the wish to move about,  
Or even to express yourself in speech,  
First examine what is in the mind.  
For steadfast ones should act accordingly.

When the urge arises in the mind  
To feelings of desire or angry hate,  
Do not act! Be silent, do not speak!  
And like a log of wood be sure to stay

As well as subduing and transforming our mind, the purpose of meditation practice is also to make our mind serviceable or workable. If we check the present state of our mind, we will notice how little control we have over our mind and how it is overwhelmingly overpowered by mental afflictions. Through meditation practice it is possible to fully subdue the mind to the point where it becomes very serviceable and obedient, and our mind will listen to whatever we say to it.

Through meditation practice we learn to recognise unwanted states of mind, which bring about unhappiness and take away inner peace, and replace them with a calm and joyful state of mind. Having within us a calm and happy state of mind will benefit us, and those who we interact with. The way to find true peace and happiness is recognising negative states of mind such as anger and hatred and then overcoming them.

Through meditation practice we begin to recognise, learn about and become aware of how a negative state of mind arises, how it disturbs us from within and serves as a source of emotional turmoils, stress, tension and restlessness. We learn to recognise it to the point that we can look at this negative state of mind and then say to it, 'You are the continual source of all of the suffering and misery in my life. I've had enough of you! I want to completely finish you off and I will never listen to you or fall under your influence'. You should even feel a sense of animosity towards the negative states of mind.

There is a lot to learn in meditation, as through it we can experience a lot about life. Meditation involves removing distracting thoughts and allowing the mind to fully settle inside. After the mind is settled within, try to experience its effect of bringing peace and stillness within you. So, you can observe here the benefits of letting the mind rest within you. On the other hand, you can recognise the disadvantages of not resting the mind within but letting it constantly wander off to external objects. The impact it has on our experience is very disturbing and sometimes it becomes out of control. Because of too many thoughts and too much mental agitation, we get tense, stressed and anxious and sometimes get depressed and restless, and as a result we become unhappy and moody.

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However, if our mind is settled inward such as when we are meditating it is fully focussed on a chosen object without being distracted by any other objects, we just feel peace and tranquillity. Of course, we cannot expect to be able to meditate well straight away as it does take time to do that. If you practise continuously with consistent effort and patience, you can gradually make progress in your meditation practice. The term for 'meditation' in Tibetan is 'gom', which literally means 'to become familiar with', so we need to become familiar with whatever we meditate upon. That's what the meditation is all about.

In our approach to meditation and to life, it is important we use intelligent knowledge and our sense of judgements. It is important that we practise meditation because with our own knowledge we understand the benefits of practising meditation and the disadvantages of not practising it. When we decide to undertake actions based on our own knowledge, it can be very effective in whatever we do. This applies to our everyday life. Whatever decisions that we make, it is good to make the utmost use of our own intelligence and judgement and go with that.

We are going to spend just a few minutes doing some breathing meditation. In this meditation practice, we want to direct the focus of the mind on the incoming and outgoing breath. The mind depends on or needs certain objects to sit on. Utilising our own breathing as an object of focus has the added benefit of calming our mind down. We need to ensure our full mental attention is on the object, not just half of it while the other half is on something else. The main obstacle that we face in meditation practice is losing our mental attention because of external distractions. Therefore, it is important to be vigilant about such distractions arising, then simply keep redirecting our mind back to the object with mindfulness.

We begin the meditation now.

*[Meditation]*

Now we will chant Buddha's mantra so switch our focus to the sound of the mantra we chant.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA.*

There is some room for questions and answers. If you have a question just raise your hand.

*Question: How do you offer support to a friend that you care about?*

It depends on the situation. Sometimes you might recognise what they are doing is wrong, but they do not see it that way and they think that what they are doing is right. If they are so fixed on their own belief, it wouldn't work if you try to correct them. It will cause more confrontation. You need a bit of skill here!

It is said that we should abandon evil friends. In terms of practice it doesn't mean that you literally abandon or distance yourselves from them. Rather it is saying that we don't have to become like our friend; in particular we should not be influenced by their negative habits. However, we should maintain our feeling of intimacy, love, friendship and kindness towards them. Of course, if you think your friend is open-minded and ready to listen to your advice, then you may point out their faults and this might be appreciated. Sometimes you do not have to directly point out the fault but indirectly help them recognise it by themselves. This is the best outcome.

When other people don't recognise and acknowledge their own faults and mistakes, sometimes pointing out their mistakes enrages them instead of helping them, and they might become very angry with you. It is the same with yourself. If you are the kind of person who is very short-tempered with an angry nature, you don't like someone else telling you that you are that type of person, even though you are. However, you do not get upset if you recognise that you do have problems such as a short-tempered nature and communication problems. However, if someone else points out your faults to you, then you get upset. That's why you need a bit of skill to help others to correct their mistakes.

A great Tibetan master said that if you mix with bad people, and evil friends, you will easily be influenced by their negative habits. Therefore, you should abandon evil friends, meaning abandon or not pick up their negative habits and conduct. Whereas, if you associate or mix with virtuous friends, then you will easily acquire their virtuous qualities. Therefore, rely on or mix with virtuous friends. So the emphasis here is not being influenced by the negative habits or conduct of the other people; conversely you should be influenced and inspired by the positive qualities of other people.

Along with this I can tell you a story about two friends. One is an alcoholic and one is not. At one time they went separate ways. The one who was alcoholic went to Phenpo, a region of Tibet where he met a geshe and associated with certain high lamas. The other one went to a different area and he became alcoholic.

One day they met, and they had noticed the changes. In our association with different people, we have to always be very alert and vigilant about the influence they have upon us. In our social life, if we are not careful we can easily get influenced by others. If your friend is alcoholic and loves drinking, they will always encourage you to drink and will even buy you a free drink. But, later on when you become a real alcoholic then they won't buy a drink for you. They will say, 'It's your turn now!'. If we drink too much, not only do we waste a lot of money, we also damage our health and we can also lose personal qualities and damage our self-respect. A while ago a local Tibetan shared his experience about how much money he spent on alcohol. He said he spent \$70 every week on alcohol and smoking. Unfortunately, he passed away at a very young age. Some people keep drinking, and it makes you wonder if they are actually tasting what they drink. A very good question, thank you!

Thank you very much for your very good attention to the teaching.

All we want in life is happiness. We want to live a happy life and want to hear from other people, 'Oh you look happy'. We want something like that.

*Transcribed by Bernii Wright  
Edit 1 by Carla Betros  
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering  
Edited Version  
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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཇུག་ལམ་རིམ་འགྲིང་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

26 September 2019

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Before we begin the meditation make sure that you feel relaxed; that's why you are here to find some relaxation, peace and tranquillity. Of the various activities that we do in our life, we can say meditation practice is the most beneficial one, because it truly brings mental and physical peace and happiness. It is very wholesome. We call activities that harm the wellbeing of our mind destructive or unwholesome activities.

We always hope that any actions we undertake in life will bring happiness and overcome difficulty or unhappiness in our life. However, if we check the actual outcome, it does not always accord with our intentions. Sometimes our actions actually destroy the joy or happiness that we already have. Instead of overcoming difficulties our actions have brought more suffering.

What we are talking here is actions that we undertake and the outcome of those actions. We realise how difficult it is to find the true peace, happiness and satisfaction that we are looking for. No matter what we do or achieve, in the end we are still frustrated and unhappy. We are not satisfied with the outcomes in terms of securing peace, happiness and satisfaction in our life. This is where some people will consider alternative methods such as meditation.

Meditation is quite different from other things that we do in that it directs us to find happiness and peace within ourselves. Indeed, through meditation practice we find more peace and happiness and reduce the suffering in our lives, because true peace and happiness lies within us. When the things that we normally do are not giving the answer that we are looking for we should stop doing that, and we should consider doing something different such as learning about meditation and finding out how it can help us.

In a nutshell, meditation practice is about safeguarding our mind and enhancing our peace and happiness. It is about developing more concentration. It is also a means of overcoming distracted and agitated thinking and allowing our mind to rest in stillness.

Here we use the term safeguarding, disciplining or controlling our mind. What does that mean? It doesn't necessarily mean that we have to sit in some specific posture, like a sitting posture. The great Indian master Shantideva advised that those who wish to control their mind should apply mindfulness and alertness with effort. He said,

O you who wish to guard your minds,  
I beseech you with folded hands;  
Always exert yourselves to guard  
Mindfulness and alertness.

We can find a lot about the meaning of mindfulness and alertness in the Buddhist scriptures, such as Asanga's *Compendium of Knowledge*. The Tibetan word for mindfulness is *drenpa* which literally means memory or remembrance.

From this point of view mindfulness refers to remembering the spiritual instructions concerning what to accept or what to reject. Therefore, if you practise mindfulness, you won't commit non-virtues and will make a conscious effort to refrain from them.

With mindfulness or the power of memory we will never forget relevant advice, particularly concerning the ethical practice of refraining from harmful actions. Hence, the practice of mindfulness is particularly important for ordained monks and nuns to safeguard their vows and adhere to pure ethical discipline. That is why His Holiness the Dalai Lama often advises people to never forget mindfulness and alertness.

Here we have many older students who have taken all the different levels of vows – the pratimoksha, bodhisattva and tantric vows. So they should understand that the only way to protect these vows is to apply mindfulness and alertness. If you practise mindfulness of, or keep remembering all the precepts, and the practices of what to do and what not to do, you will not break any precept or vow. That is very important.

You will find various terms in English to describe alertness, such as introspection, vigilance or awareness. Basically, alertness or introspection is the wisdom or intelligent part of our mind that has the ability to discern the pros and cons of our actions of body, speech and mind. Through alertness we can recognise if our actions are corrupted by any faults, and this allows us to take appropriate counter measures. As part of applying alertness we always need to be vigilant and watch our verbal, physical or mental actions, and monitor whether they are positive or negative. So, alertness is an important tool to apply in our practice. With mindfulness we are able to retain our full focus on the practice while alertness enables us to prevent faults or obstacles.

Not only should we apply mindfulness and alertness in sitting meditation, but we should also apply it in our everyday life so that whatever actions we do will be effective and beneficial. As said before, by virtue of applying mindfulness in meditation we will be able to retain our mental focus on a virtuous object. Because of the force of mindfulness, we won't forget the object, just as someone who is very hungry will always remember food and can't get rid of the thought of eating. I remember a young boy when I was in Varanasi, who missed his elder brother very badly especially when he was hungry. He had a very affectionate brother who used to feed him with his hand. So, the boy used to say that when he got hungry he remembered his brother's hand. The boy left Varanasi after a couple of months.

You should hold or remember the object in meditation with mindfulness, just as the boy remembered his brother's hand when he was hungry. An example closer to our own experience is when we fall in love with someone, and how we become so obsessed and attached to that person. At that time thoughts of that person are always present in our minds or, in other words, the image of that person appears spontaneously and continuously. In a similar way, we need to develop the force of mindfulness so that we are able to retain our focus on the object continuously, forcefully and spontaneously in meditation practice. However, every now and then we should apply alertness, checking whether the mind is really focusing on the object or not. Doing this will help to bring more clarity and stability to the mind during meditation.

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We will do just a few minutes of breathing meditation. First make sure you relax your body. Then check your motivation, in order to know why you are meditating. Sometimes, if you have more time, do a bit of reflection on the benefits of practising meditation and shortcomings of not practising meditation. After you have cultivated the right motivation, try to get rid of all outgoing thoughts or external distractions, so that your mind will fully abide within. Having brought the mind inward, then instead of wandering off to any other object, direct the mental attention just on the incoming and outgoing breath, without being distracted by any external objects. Begin this meditation now please.  
(Pause for meditation)

Begin chanting Buddha's mantra, again without losing your focus to any external objects, as you chant, just focus on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNI YE SOHA

There is an opportunity for questions and answers. Please raise your hand if you have a question.

*Question. Sometimes when I am busy, I get distracted and then disturbed by something like a news item on my phone. After that I find it very difficult to return my concentration to the task at hand. What can I do to overcome this problem?*

You may have to take the state of your concentration to the next level. Initially our concentration can only last for a minute or even a few seconds. In order to stay there longer without losing concentration, whatever the other causes, we have to have an increased state of concentration. In order to achieve this, we need to do more meditation. Does that relate to your question?

The question is how we can make progress in meditation. If we are not careful we can fall into bad habits when we are doing meditation. Usually when distraction arises we try even harder and sometimes even force ourselves to return to meditation. However, distraction arises easily, and then we get frustrated. If we approach meditation like this, then, no matter how long and how many times we practice, we always fall into the same bad habit and don't make any progress.

Lama Tsong Khapa advised that for beginners it is good to make the length of your session short but have more frequent sessions. So, initially if you may be able to stay on your object of meditation for only two or three minutes and after that your mind wanders off. At that time, it is better to take a short break instead of trying too hard to get the mind back on to the object. You can utilise the break time for some relaxation. You should then return to the next meditation session and see whether in this session you can retain your concentration a bit longer than in the previous session, say one to four minutes longer. If your concentration lapses again and you are unable to focus, take another break. Quality is far more important than quantity if you want to learn how to tame your mind.

Between mental and sensory consciousness, mental consciousness is the more dominating in the sense that when the mind is fully focussed on a particular object, then the sensory consciousness ceases to be functional in the sense of not noticing form, sound, smell etc, even if these objects are present. That's why we won't be able recall perceiving any sensory objects later on. Therefore, if we are meditating well

with good concentration then we should not be hearing noises or visually seeing things even if these objects are present.

The benefit of meditation also extends to your everyday life, where an increased state of concentration is a very useful tool to do your job more effectively.

One of the goals of meditation practice is to be able to gain control of the mind, so that it is in your hands when you want your mind to concentrate. If you have the ability to direct your mind in whichever direction you want, you can use the same ability with any other things that you do in the world. There is no doubt there are very many benefits of practising meditation and thought transformation. So, we must practise meditation and make no excuses for avoiding practising it.

Some people say that due to traumatic experiences from childhood due to too much pressure from or abuse by family members, they find it too difficult to apply the practice. Some people think they do not have time for meditation, but they go to a movie or go jogging. Five minutes of meditation in the morning will make your jogging much better. What we need to do is to make a consistent effort and hope for gradual progress. In the scriptures there is an illustration of a large tree which has a very sour taste. You cannot change the whole tree to taste sweet by adding one drop of sweetener. However, there is a chance to change the taste if a drop of sweetener is added over a long period of time.

Likewise, if we think of our own view of happiness and the actions we take to bring about happiness, we see that for a long time, we have had a fixed idea that happiness results from external objects, and so all our actions in pursuit of happiness have had an external focus. We don't have a genuine knowledge or conviction of the fact that true peace and happiness is lying within us, let alone the importance of doing regular practice. It is not realistic to expect profound happiness from a bit of spiritual practice.

At the same time, we should not give up. We should persevere on a regular basis. If we don't achieve our goal in this life, at least we plant some seeds for future lives. Grasping too much at this life, always thinking of money is not good. It is better not to think too much and to just relax. You don't have children?

*Student: One.*

My younger sister has nine children! One is Kelsang, who works in Café Bliss. I was seventeen when I left, and my younger sister was nine. Australia is a very good land of opportunity, but some leaders here do not care about the people. They cry if they lose their seat in parliament, but they have no compassion for the homeless. Women are more suited to leadership roles because of their natural tendency to compassion and loving kindness. It is good to think about harmony and happiness in the home and make sure you do no harm.

*Transcribed by Kim Foon Looi*

*Edit 1 by Carla Betros*

*Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering*

*Edited Version*

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meditation, so that you will practise tolerance and patience to ensure your ability to show some resilience and endurance in the face of adverse situations. The practice of patience definitely doesn't mean that you are responsive, while holding the anger within yourself in the form of resentment, which can be very destructive.

We can encourage and motivate ourselves to cultivate a more positive mental attitude, such as being kind, compassionate and extending more love towards those with whom we interact every day. We will be able to recognise the benefit of cultivating and developing a positive mental attitude, which is not only for our own experience of peace and happiness, but also our actions and the impression we give to others – whatever we are saying and doing – will be very pleasing to them. This is how we can strengthen our relationship with others.

We can notice that each negative state of mind, such as anger, produces a different experience and has a different effect. Sometimes strong desire or attachment can also be negative emotions in the sense that they can cause much misery and suffering. The feeling of desire and attachment and its effect can be very different. You will notice that when you experience the emotion of anger, it can be very wild and rough. It will be apparent immediately, so after becoming aware of it, if you acknowledge that it is very harmful and tell yourself that you have to be more careful to ensure that you don't do anything under the influence of this emotion, the anger will suddenly decrease.

When anger arises, the destructive force can be very apparent, but at the same time, it can be easier for us to recognise its shortcomings, and therefore we are able to overcome it more easily. However it is not like that when we experience strong desire and attachment. Desire as an emotion is quite deceptive in that it gives us a rather pleasant feeling, and a notion that fulfilling the desire is a way to bring about happiness. Of course, that's not the case and in fact if desire is not overcome, then in the long run, it can bring more harm to oneself. It is even harder to overcome than anger.

Therefore, we have to try to understand that when we engage in meditation practice, our sole purpose is to counteract the negative states of mind within us, by calming and controlling our mind, because it is said that if we have control over our mind, we are free of the effects of the negative mental afflictions. When we don't have control of our mind and we check who has control, we will notice that our mind is under the control and power of the various mental afflictions such as anger, desire and so forth. We are always overpowered by our mind, and the actions we carry out depend on our state of our mind. It is said that the only way to achieve some sense of freedom and happiness is to gain control over one's mind. The great Sakya Pandita said that achieving self independence is like achieving the state of happiness, whereas not having self independence and being under the control of other force is misery and suffering. Therefore, there is no escape from misery and suffering if our mind is under the control of or overpowered by these mental afflictions.

As part of giving advice to monks for example, the Buddha said that if the monk has a short-tempered nature, then you should offer good food, clothing and a nice shelter. However, if the monk is desirous and lustful, then you should not offer good food, clothing and shelter. What we learn from this is when someone is very angry, if you offer very delicious food or do something to please that person; once that person is mentally pleased or something gives them pleasure, then it will automatically cause the anger to disappear because the food that you offer gives them some mental happiness, which cannot co-exist with the hatred towards you.

There is a difference between someone who understands anger and its shortcomings and also how to counteract it, and someone else who does not understand this. Someone with the understanding can recognise anger when it arises, and also they can apply an antidote to counter it. Whereas a person who doesn't have any knowledge about anger and its detrimental affects, will easily fall prey to anger and won't know how to get out of the clutch of anger.

We can apply different techniques in order to handle various states of mind. For example, in order to challenge the mind of desire, whatever we apply, our approach cannot be gentle. I'd would like to share a story about a younger friend who was very fond of me, who I used to deliberately tease and annoy when he was sleeping peacefully. I would smear his face or do something to wake him up, and my friend would get very upset and angry. This continued, and eventually my friend changed his nature. On the other hand, as mentioned previously, the way to challenge someone with an angry mind is to do something gentle, such as offer food to please someone who is angry with you.

Before we begin our usual breathing meditation, it is important to make ourselves comfortable and to relax physically. If you are familiar with a certain meditation posture, then you can adopt that, such as with two hands in meditative equipoise. It is also important to get rid of all distracting thoughts from the mind, making sure that the mind is calmed down and is fully resting within yourself. In the same way that our body depends on the ground on which to sit, likewise our mind also needs an object on which to rest. The object for this meditation is the breath, so what we will be doing in this meditation is to try to keep the mind on the inhaling and exhaling alone, without letting it wander off to other objects. We will begin the meditation now.

*[Pause for single-pointed meditation]*

We will continue the meditation with the chanting of the Buddha's mantra. As we chant, we simply direct our focus to the sound of the mantra.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

That's all for tonight; thank you for coming to this talk.

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor  
Edit 1 by Ingrid Leibbrandt  
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Edited Version*

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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

10 October 2018

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So, as always we should begin with a fully relaxed body. In addition to achieving a relaxed body, one thing I always make an effort to do, and also advise other people to do, is to try to achieve a restful, peaceful and clear state of mind so that we can truly feel at rest.

We say that we don't have time for rest and enjoyment, which is really not true. If we think of the time we have, we spend more time at home than at work. However, even though we don't have any obligations or are not physically occupied with work, we may not feel we are at rest, rather we may feel stressed and anxious. If we check the cause of our stress and anxiety, obviously it is not work related or because we are overly busy with some physical activity. So the obvious cause of our restlessness is the lack of peace and tranquillity within our mind because mentally we still are keeping ourselves overly busy with too many distracting thoughts. If we check at that particular moment and ask ourselves if our mind is at home or at work, then most likely we will find that our mind is at work or outside, not at home. If we think along these lines, then we can recognise that we disadvantage ourselves when our mind is not present or not where our body is.

This shows us how wonderful it would be if our mind was resting in the same place as our body. I think there is a tremendous benefit in gaining some sort of skill and knowledge about achieving peace and happiness both on the physical and mental level to ensure that when we are physically at rest and enjoying life's comforts, we are mentally at rest and happy too.

When we age, like when we live to over seventy years old, obviously we will be doing less externally or physically. We will be spending more time at home or by ourselves. Therefore, at this time, if we have an ability to mentally or inwardly find peace, then we will truly experience a sense of a deeper, greater and more meaningful life with peace, happiness and satisfaction.

Most people work hard and try to save money during the early period of their life so when they retire or reach the age of seventy, materially they have enough to provide for themselves and will have nothing to worry about. Therefore, at that time, if they also have enough inner knowledge and meditational experience to maintain a peaceful and clear state of mind that would be a tremendous benefit.

Essentially, peace and happiness in our life is contingent upon external and internal factors, although our view of happiness is primarily based on the external or physical level in terms of material conditions. Of course, good material conditions are very important. Therefore, I

particularly advise younger people to complete their education, work hard and secure wealth for the future. However, good material conditions alone are not enough so I also advise them to learn about Dharma and meditation to maintain a positive mental attitude, peace and clarity within their mind.

I encourage people to make the best use of their time because whatever we want to achieve in life takes time. In other words, it is not something we are going to achieve all of a sudden. It's the same with meditation practice. Here, we are talking about training; about being able to control and calm our mind. Through our knowledge and experience of mind training, whenever we are confronted with a disturbed, unhappy or agitated state of mind, we will be able to utilise our knowledge and overcome that. In order to be able to do that, we need to train ourselves in meditation practice. So we have to start at the beginning.

I always say we have to start from a young age to meditate and get insight into our mind. If we have been training and doing the practice for a long period of time, then we will find it easier when we are old. Sometimes, if we don't practice for long enough, then in old age, we may find it very difficult. In fact, sometimes I find it is easier to influence or teach people at a younger age than to teach older people whose mind can be too fixed. I find them more accepting and receptive to what I am trying to say.

Therefore, we have to realise, particularly when we are young, how important education is. No matter what priorities we have, like having a social life and making friends, it will be very harmful in the long run if we waste opportunities in our youth. We should concentrate on getting an education rather than wasting time socialising with friends and just going along with them. We must make the best use of this time and be successful with our education and our career and save money for the future. It is important to save money in the bank but at the same time we should invest in developing our knowledge in regard to maintaining a positive state of mind and overcoming negative states of mind. There is no point in increasing our savings if we cannot use them to find true peace and happiness. Along with material wealth, we need to increase our investment in terms of securing peace and happiness within ourselves; not decreasing or losing that. Here, we are talking about mind training, knowledge about our mind and meditation practice.

Unless we have some ability to subdue our mind, we will find it very difficult to find mental peace, without which we cannot be at peace – even if we find peace externally by taking a break from work. We can observe that we can be physically at rest and doing nothing, and how our mind can be preoccupied by various distracting thoughts and how, as a result, we feel restless. In such times, we may find it extremely difficult to bring our mind back from disturbing thoughts and emotions, which overwhelms and overpowers our mind. We simply become prey to these disturbing thoughts and this clearly shows our inability and weakness in subduing the mind. Therefore, in order to overcome and minimise the influence of disturbing thoughts, we engage in

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meditation practice which is a form of mind training or discipline whereby we make the mind stay inward by placing it on a given object.

Meditation is a way to bring the mind inside. When we talk about getting control over the mind, sometimes people get this wrong notion that meditation means that we can't think about the outside world or engage in it. They think that when someone meditates or is a spiritual person, they are inward or will always be withdrawn. But in fact, that is wrong because meditation practice is simply a means of gaining control over or subduing the mind. If we gain control over our mind, then we can engage in the external world more effectively and positively.

With a controlled state of mind, if we see external objects, for example a very attractive object, our mind cannot easily become obsessed with it or crave for it. Whereas, if we do not have a controlled state of mind, then sometimes we easily get attracted to or obsessed with an object and then suffer as a result. In a way, that object becomes like a power which controls our mind and we lose our self-control. We lose control of the mind and feel so weak, as if that attractive object has almost sucked all the energy out of us.

So, the whole point of meditation practice is to gain control of the mind and stop disturbing thoughts. When we have a controlled state of mind and engage in an activity or with an object it won't have much impact on us. Whereas, if we don't have control over our mind, then, in a sense, we become very vulnerable to external things and situations.

When we talk about meditation practice it usually involves some sort of discipline including a physical posture with specific features. Of course, that alone is not enough. At the same time, we need to try to discipline the mind by focusing on a particular object. It is recommended that initially we should keep the duration of each session short by dividing it into a number of sessions. As we make progress then we slowly extend the length of each session and minimise the number of sessions. What is more important is to consider the effectiveness or the quality of our practice than the length or frequency of the practice. By doing the meditation properly, we will gradually notice an improvement, such as an increased period of good concentration on the object.

We need to understand the benefit and the method of meditation practice very clearly so that we can be more motivated and effectively engage in the practice. Of course, in the end, it doesn't matter how much we learn about meditation practice, the most important thing to do is to put it into practice. In this regard, it is not good enough for me to advise others to do meditation practice and be kind to others and so on but I must also put that into practice. If I do not put it into practice then I, as a follower of the Buddha, am lying to myself as well as to the Lord Buddha. Also, I would not be able to consider myself a spiritual practitioner because I would not be practising what I teach others. Therefore, both teachers and disciples must take their spiritual practice seriously. Not only should they say that they should practise but

they must also find the time and use that time to practise. This is very important.

In fact, there is some advice relating to teachers called the four means of gathering disciples of which two are about teachers teaching in accordance with the interest and needs of the disciples and then putting that into practice themselves. In other words, they should inspire others to put the Dharma they teach into practice, as well as putting it into practice themselves.

So, we will begin the usual breathing meditation. In this meditation, we will be focusing our mind on inhaling and exhaling as an object of the mind. Sometimes, we call the object of meditation an object to place the mind upon, but I would also like to call that object an object that obstructs or blocks the mind. Here, the object is the breath upon which we place our mind but it is also an object which blocks or obstructs the mind from running away after other objects. We are supposed to fix the mind. In meditation, when we focus the mind on the breath, we want to make sure that our focus is not just half and half, rather that it is fully focussed on the object.

We are applying some sort of discipline, some sort of training to the mind in which we make it sit on that given object. Obviously, in the beginning our mind might not be able to do this. It is not used to sitting or listening to us, so it may not sit there or it might sit there only for one or two minutes, definitely not for an hour. However, if we meditate, which means to familiarise ourselves in this practice of mind training or meditation practice, then eventually we get some sort of confidence or some sort of capacity to retain a longer period of our mental attention and also have some control over our mind. We can then utilise the same capability of controlling the mind in our everyday life or outside of the meditation practice. For instance, afterwards, if we experience some unwanted, agitated state of mind, we can redirect and divert the mind to a different object or thought. Therefore, our knowledge and familiarity with the meditation practice will be very useful in helping us overcome lots of problems in everyday life, particularly those which are mainly related to our mind. So, we now begin the meditation.

*[Meditation]*

So we will now chant the Buddha's mantra. Just continue our meditation and instead of losing our mind to any external object, we redirect it to the sound of the mantra.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Question: My father is very ill and I am finding it difficult to look after him. What advice do you have?*

I understand and am sorry to hear that your father is very sick and also that you are finding it very difficult to look after him. I encourage you to continuously take good care of him. It is said that supporting and taking good care of your parents is the true Dharma practice and in fact the excellent Dharma practice. Normally, it is regarded as a rightful duty of children to look after their aged parents just as they showed much care and support to them in

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their childhood and throughout their whole lives. Besides, the parents appreciate any help they receive from their children more than help they receive from other people. Some old parents keep aside a bunch of flowers they receive from children and take great pride in telling others that it comes from their children. So, your help means a lot to your father. I understand it is a tough time for you and that there are lots of things happening in your life but you should try to be a bit braver and endure whatever you are going through and do your best to support your father.

When we accept our situation, when we are willing to take upon certain situations, our willingness and our acceptance of the situation actually transforms the situation into something easier and lighter. A mother who has a very difficult child, like a child who is not sleeping at night, has to stay up the whole night, yet she is quite happy to make that sacrifice because she has willingly accepted it.

It is said that the most important factor in overcoming difficulties is our mental acceptance or preparedness to confront the situation. Whereas, if there is not enough mental determination, if we cannot accept hardship or difficulty and are not prepared to endure it, then the situation will overtake us, and we will fall under its pressure. We won't be able to bear that situation. Whereas, if we are mentally determined, then we are on top of it, therefore we will not feel that the difficulty or hardship is too stressful.

Given that your father is old and sick and given that he is also your father, from the point of view of the Dharma, there is no better object for you to practise Dharma on than him. There was one monk who had a very aged mother. She was very sick and he was very concerned about her. However, her sister was taking very good care of her. I asked him how is his mother? 'My mother's mind is very, very happy,' he said. 'She is very sick but very happy. Her sister is looking after her very well – twenty-four hours a day.' I said to the monk, 'well, her sister is demonstrating true Dharma practice. There is no doubt about that. Her actions are truly benefiting another, especially someone who is in need and dependent on receiving help from others.' What I meant to imply to the monk is that when we do meditation practice it is doubtful whether or not it is even Dharma practice.

It is good that, at the moment, you have the opportunity to support your father because it is better to support him than regretting it later if you haven't given him the support he deserves. There are some people who didn't support their parents while they were alive and after they passed away they feel bad; they feel regret. What's the point of that? Therefore, if you do your best to be supportive, then you will feel good that you did everything you could.

From this question, everyone can get some idea of the importance of supporting each other. Especially those who are close to us, like our family members. In fact, I have been advising people over and over again to be kind; to be friendly to others. My intention in teaching has never ever been to convert people to Buddhism or for people to become Buddhists. That was not my intention.

Even His Holiness Dalai Lama advises that should not be the intention. What is most important is to benefit others from my heart. Out of that spirit of helping or benefiting others, I always come here trying to share my knowledge and to say that the most important thing is to maintain good relationships with other people and be kind and support each other.

Thank you

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo*

*Edit 1 by Katherine Boland*

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*Edited Version*

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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

17 October 2018

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As usual we begin with just relaxing ourselves physically. For us to be at peace and in a state of happiness, as well as relaxing the body it is also important that our mind is at peace and in a state of happiness. So therefore, after relaxing ourselves physically, then we should look within our mind to also bring about peace and happiness within the mind.

If we check what kind of effect our mind has on our experience, then we will notice that there is a huge effect. The moment our mind is at peace, it becomes calm and very clear, then automatically (by just having a calm mind) we will be also at peace, and a lot of problems or difficulties within us will simply dissipate.

It is obvious that when our mind is calm and peaceful, then when we interact with others there is no way we would cause them any harm.

If we consider our own reality or our own life situation, we know we are a part of a community or society. Everyone as a human being is dependent on a community and some other person, hence, befriending or having a good relationship with other people - this is important as a social being. Whatever the nature or form of our relationship with others may be, such as between a man and woman, we do not want any stress conflict and tension. Therefore, we need to think about the main causes that bring about such stress and conflict, and any effective means to overcoming it in our relationships.

## How to build a happy relationship

We also need to consider why we need an amicable relationship with others, and consider what we are looking for, or what are our expectations in a relationship. We are hoping that a relationship will secure more happiness, more joy and more stability in our lives.

In a harmonious intimate relationship there are mutual benefits in the form of more support and loving kindness to one another resulting in more satisfaction, joy and happiness for all concerned. If we look into the main cause that strengthens or damages such relationship, we will find that it lies within us rather than related to something external or material objects. Therefore, our criterion for building this type of relationship should not be based on external values, such as the amount of wealth, physical attraction and social status. External things don't guarantee what we look for in the relationship, which is genuine happiness. It is not the case that increases of wealth, for instance, will bring more happiness. Therefore, the important element to build and make a relationship sustainable and beneficial is a true feeling of **love and care**. We know from our experience

that when there is a true sense of love, care and friendship in our relationship, then we enjoy the companionship regardless of whether the external condition is good or bad. However, when that feeling of intimate love and care is missing, then instead of happiness there is tension, fear and mistrust in the relationship, and any favourable external conditions will lack meaning.

Since having a good relationship with other/s is an important factor for ensuring lasting peace and happiness in our lives, we need to think about cultivating genuine love and care for other beings. Recognising that loving kindness and compassion will never arise within us if our mental continuum is too disturbed and distracted by unruly thought, we should first meditate to calm our mind down from all the disturbing thoughts. We need to be diligent and consistent in practising meditation in order to achieve calmness and clarity within us, which is a very important factor to bring about the kind of transformation that we would like see within ourselves.

There is no doubt that if we **cultivate a very positive and a peaceful state of mind**, then the benefit will be there all the time. No matter where you are, who you are with, at work or with anyone in the community, if you have a calm and positive state of mind you can be happy and peaceful. Even other people will see you as being a good natured and admirable person. We already possess some degree of peace and happiness within us, but we may be not doing enough to safeguard it against any obstacles such as when we face an irritable circumstance we are unable to tolerate by losing our temper or getting angry and as a result losing our inner peace and happiness. Due to anger in our mind, not only do we lose self-control and become restless but also our perspective of things will become negative, for example, beginning to hate our friend for no reason. It is not that our friend that has changed and begun to hate us, however he or she will appear to us to have changed solely because of our mental attitude under the influence of anger. Therefore, it is important to give a thought to what we can do to minimise such a negative mental attitude overruling our mind as it can damage our good relationship with others and also the positive qualities, we possess within us.

Given our experience in life, the most important thing is the feeling of peace, joy and happiness that we find within. If we think about the main factors or the main causes to achieve inner peace and happiness, of course the main causes are not to do with material or external objects. Suppose that material or external objects are the true cause of bringing mental happiness, then it has to be the case that the more we acquire those material objects, then automatically we should find more satisfaction, more peace and more happiness. But we know from our own experience this is not necessarily the case. On the other hand, we could say it is the case that inwardly if we enrich ourselves with or develop a more positive state of mind or mental attitude such as **the feeling of love and compassion towards others**, then this brings us more joy and happiness and satisfaction in our life. We should also think that developing inner qualities is a good investment, a true investment for our own happiness and satisfaction in our life. We should also believe that we can

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achieve that; developing our positive inner qualities is something within the reach of all of us, of most people with a sensible mind. We can do that. There is nothing stopping us from cultivating such love and positive way of thinking.

Whereas if our security of happiness and satisfaction is entirely based on external things, then this is not something that everybody can achieve. Because if our satisfaction and happiness is really dependent on the acquisition of material wealth such as a house or car, then as we know, we have to say that this is not within reach nor easy for most people. However, even if we gain much material wealth, it will not guarantee satisfaction and give us true fulfillment in our life. Looking from this kind of perspective, we should come to the understanding of the benefits of developing more inner quality, which not only is the true source of our happiness but also it is something that is within our reach or we have the capacity or potential to achieve it.

To summarise what we have discussed here, we begin with the importance of cultivating a positive, calm and clear state of mind. This is because a happy mind is essential to live our life in happiness. Then we look into what will impede or obstruct us from achieving that. Or if we have already peace and happiness, we need to know how to safeguard it. Positive and negative states of mind are mutually exclusive, in that the arising of one will preclude the arising of the other. We call the negative states of mind 'mental afflictions' because whenever they arise in us, we lose our mental peace and happiness. Therefore, if we want to feel peace and happiness within us, we must **overcome our mind being overpowered by mental afflictions** and understand that meditation is the most effective way to counteract the mental afflictions. So we should integrate a meditation practice into our lives.

We have been saying how true peace and happiness does not necessarily depend on outer conditions. Instead it depends more on our ability to maintain or to safeguard a peaceful and positive state of mind within ourselves. So of course, we ask the question 'is it possible to achieve the ability to maintain such a positive state of mind all the time?' Considering all of the normal unruly habits of the mind, we might think that it is difficult. But it is not necessarily difficult. It becomes difficult because of our lack of putting effort in this regard, and also a lack of our understanding and faith in our ability to achieve that inner transformation. If we **recognise our true potential** or capability as a human being - we will be amazed to find that what is possible to achieve. Considering humanity's accomplishment in the development of science and technology, I am so amazed that all these developments resulted from a human brain or mind - and we all have the same mind. - Look at the various human inventions; for example, just think of aeroplanes that allow us travel in space; it really astonishes me how we made it!

Likewise, some highly evolved spiritual practitioners can perform supernatural or miraculous powers through their ability in manipulating and controlling the natural force of elements. Also, if we observe the life of spiritual practitioners of various spiritual traditions, how some of

them always radiate peace, serenity, joy and happiness wherever they are and whoever they are with, this comes from their inner realisations. I may also say here that I have a bit of peace and happiness coming forth from my little experience of spiritual practice. Therefore, it is certainly possible to achieve a sustained state of inner peace and happiness, which we can maintain throughout all our actions such as walking, sitting, standing or sleeping and under all circumstances.

Of course, we are not saying here that we can immediately get rid of all the problems in our life. In fact, problems and difficulties are inevitable part of our daily lives. However, in the face of these difficulties it is important not to inwardly **lose our determination and our hope**, and not becoming discouraged by difficult situations. If we give up and we lose hope and just get discouraged, then we will become depressed or problems can overtake us. We need to recognise and **accept the fact that problems are inevitable**, but we should try to face this with a sense of hope and courage and never lose a positive outlook. His Holiness the Dalai Lama often remarks that one of the most important lessons that he learned in life was during the hardest and most difficult time of his life.

As usual we are going to do a short breathing meditation. Start by relaxing your body and making yourself comfortable, and then try to slowly overcome all of the distracting thoughts 100 per cent. The important point is to let the mind completely rest within yourself by overcoming all external thoughts. Having brought the mind inward, direct your focus and place the mind on the incoming and outgoing breath. As much as possible try to make every effort to keep the mind on the incoming and outgoing breath with single-pointed concentration.

*[Meditation]*

We can continue the meditation with the chanting of the Buddha's mantra

So as before, try to keep the mind within yourself but just shift your focus to the sound of the mantra that we chant.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA*

Maybe there is room for just one question. So please raise your hand if you have a question.

*Question: When you look at us, do you think that we should all join a monastery to excel in our development?*

Maybe that is the best option, but it is not for everyone. There are many cases where people join a monastery or nunnery and then afterwards a lot of them return back to where they started. So, the main prerequisite for joining a monastic community or choosing to live an ordained life is cultivating a true sense of renunciation, which is an aspiration to achieve liberation from samsara. The renunciation arises from a deep sense of disgust or remorse towards worldly pleasures because of recognising all the faults of samsara. Those who have cultivated such renunciation are suitable to become monks or nuns

I have many other stories where people who, due to some immediate problems, got so sick of their normal life and then they came to me and said they wanted to renounce

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the world and live a celibate life. But soon afterward they changed their minds due to the changes in their life circumstance. I had one woman who wanted to become a nun but a week later she got pregnant. Then, another woman who was so determined to become a nun and discussed it with me. But I said that she should take her time and there is no rush; essentially, I tried to discourage her. Then afterward she came back, and she said I was right, and she decided not to go ahead as she found a nice man!

Of course, I am not saying that those people who discussed their situation with me are lying to me. I knew that they were very honest and open to me and facing certain difficulties in their lives. However, as I am aware that our life situation is continuously changing, and along with that our perspective is also changing. So, what we think today is right thing to do is not necessarily the right thing to do the next day. So in general the advice that I give to others is to continue with their spiritual practice, that they can easily apply without needing to make a drastic change in their lifestyle, for example the practice of cultivating and developing loving kindness. This is something we can all do, and it is a very profound practice as well.

Whether or not you are going to become a spiritual person is not a matter of changing what you are wearing. And also simply putting on a robe doesn't mean that you are going to change, or become a different person. Any changes come from the mind. So in **between the two of changing our outer look and inner look, our inner look is more important**. Hence, the practice of thought transformation is what we need to adopt. By the way, becoming a monk or nun is a good thought! It is definitely true that if all of you became a good monk or nun - that definitely would be the best outcome, although I am afraid this will have a severe affect to sustenance of human evolution

So really the focus of tonight's talk is on the importance of the benefit of cultivating a positive state of mind, and the benefit in terms of maintaining a harmonious or a good relationship with others. Also how applying the meditation practice is very effective in terms of counteracting emotional difficulties, for example losing our temper or generating a negative state of mind. We have to do something, and if we don't counteract this, then it can really damage our life, our relationships, and our peace and happiness. In order to counteract any negative states of mind, think of practising meditation. If you bring loving kindness and compassion into your relationships, then naturally there will be support and care for each other, and this will strengthen our intimacy and our relationship.

So definitely, I welcome your question. However normally, I don't advise people to join a monastery or nunnery to become a monk or a nun. Rather, I prefer to focus on being kind to other people and being particularly kind and loving to those who are close to you - your friends and family. I understand the importance of having someone in life to rely on, just as our parents have each other. Even for ourselves having someone in our life is also important. Therefore in a practical sense, putting

an effort into cultivating love and compassion towards others is essential.

However, it is inevitable that we face problems such as separation from our friends. When we face this, again we have to be able to apply our meditation practice, so we can cope well, and we don't experience a great deal of suffering and difficulty in confronting such situations.

Thank you.

*Transcribed by Bernii Wright  
Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena  
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering  
Edited Version  
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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

24 October 2018

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As usual let's begin by just relaxing our body thinking that the reason why we are here is to teach our mind positive habits, and positive ways of thinking, and indeed, this is a perfect time to achieve that. If we have a positive state of mind, or an ability to cultivate a positive state of mind, then whenever we find some moments of physical peace and relaxation, we can find ourselves truly at peace and happiness. **True peace and happiness arises more on the mental level than on a physical level.**

In reality, if we observe our experience, we can see that if our mind is at peace, we feel that way as well and we are able to say we are happy. If our mind is not at peace, then we not happy even if physically we are not busy and there is nothing to complain about. Unhappiness in the form of frustration, restlessness, stress, anxiety, fear etc., arises from an uncontrolled state of mind.

Whether you are rich or poor, of high or low social status, famous or not famous, educated or illiterate, everyone can become a victim of their own minds. If our mind is not checked and brought under control, it will wander off recklessly and be inundated with uncontrolled disturbing thoughts. That what we should blame for our restlessness, inability to think clearly, our misdeeds, feeling empty, hopeless and miserable. At worst, these thoughts can drive us to insanity and even suicidal actions.

For example, some people have sought advice from me on how to deal with depression. My advice to them is to try to diminish disturbing thoughts and feel the peace and tranquillity within themselves. I believe that sometimes too many distracting thoughts or too much mental activity can trigger mental disorders, like anxiety and depression. Some people have shared with me their experience of how their mental or emotional experience affects their cognitive or perceptive experience. For instance, when they feel depressed, their perception of the world and things outside also looks depressing.

So there is no question that if we do not do something to understand our minds and keep an eye on it, then our minds will enslave us and bring us much suffering.

Sometimes we hear in the news of very well-known public figures facing criminal charges in their later years when they really don't have much time left to live. In some cases, they face the prospect of ending their lives in prison. They suffer from having to cope with public opinion and having to deal with the media, lawyers etc. If we trace back the causes, then in some cases it is to do with their irresponsible actions and which were in turn driven by their irresponsible thoughts and minds.

So in this way, we can understand our potential for achieving peace, stability and happiness, simply through **calming our minds and thereby living more fulfilling lives.** With our mind at peace, we can be sure that whenever we find some quiet time such as when we stop busying ourselves with any work we can experience a true sense of peace and happiness. It is beneficial to utilise such quiet time to reflect upon our mind, in order to understand it more and clear away any unwanted thoughts and emotions.

Within the mind lies a force or capacity which can be positive and creative or negative and destructive. One aim of the **meditation practice is to increase the positive force** and decrease the negative force. The term for meditation in Tibetan is *sGom* which literally means 'to become familiar with', which is to say that meditation practice is to familiarise our mind with virtuous objects or states of mind, which the mind is not presently familiar with. For example, meditating on loving kindness means to cultivate and develop that loving kindness in our mind so that our mind becomes familiar with it. In other words, through familiarity with it, loving kindness will arise very easily within our minds.

We generate various states of mind and whether they arise easily or not is dependent on how familiar we are with that particular state of mind. Since the true cause of happiness is a positive state of mind, and the true cause of suffering is the negative state of mind, having more positive states of mind means we happy, and having more negative states of mind means we are unhappy. We know this from our own experience.

Therefore, the more we understand the benefits of having positive states of mind such as loving kindness in terms of bringing more peace and happiness, more we will be inspired to practise meditation. I quite often say that if loving-kindness is an object, then it is the most valuable object that we can possess. We need to realise that we can find a great deal of happiness and reduce so many problems in our lives through simply training, transforming or educating our mind.

Sometimes we suffer because of attachment or desire to possess an object. **Desire is a form of mental delusion or afflictive emotion** which gives an exaggerated notion of the desirability of the object. Caught by the influence of desire, not only do we undergo suffering, but we also lose our sense of clear discrimination. It is as if desire has blinded our intelligence and wisdom. Because of desire, for example, we cannot clearly discern what is beneficial or harmful for us now, or in the future. Hence, we should remain vigilant against desire and its harmful and destructive consequences

Some other times, we suffer because of an unwanted thought arising uncontrollably, which we find extremely difficult to overcome. When we think about it, the cause of the problem is just one single thought or emotion, yet we fail to recognise it. Instead, we fuel that thought and keep it constantly in mind, so it goes around and around in our mind. No matter what other things we do, unless we rid ourselves of that disturbing thought we cannot get back to our normal lives and find peace and happiness

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So in that situation, we can see that the solution or **remedy is meditation practice**, which is an effective means to direct our mind towards a virtuous object and rest it there. When we engage in a meditation practice our mind is fixed on the object of the meditation. Therefore, if a person has, for example, a covetous thought, the moment his mind is engaged in meditation, it is diverted or disengaged from that covetous thought, and as a result, he can feel some sort of inner freedom and ease in place of covetousness.

Sometimes you see people shedding tears while they are alone. This reflects their thoughts and emotions, more often to do with sadness than happiness, but we may find it difficult to recognise the cause. I remember once a monk named Tamding was found crying for no apparent reason. On another occasion, a monk was hosting his sister, and he found her crying. He asked his teacher why she was crying because he was unsure about the reason.

Considering all the points just raised, we should remember what was said by a Kadampa master: unless we understand the mind, where it is going, where it should be and where it should not go, then no matter what we do, we cannot find lasting peace and happiness.

When we contemplate this passage, then we can find all the teachings related to mind training are just so true, relevant and effective. This advice is like an arrow striking your heart.

Generally speaking, it is said that **worldly life is in the nature of suffering**. We also know that there are enough inevitable problems and hurdles in life that we have to face for survival. On top of this, however, if our mind is not subdued, then, it can add a lot more problems, and in this way making our lives even more challenging and difficult. In fact, a lot of people find the hardship of life too hard to cope with. Because they lack knowledge of their mind, they never consider looking into their mind and ridding it of built-in worries, stress and tension. So they have to live with those internal problems, as well as cope with all sorts of problems they encounter in the outside world. We can understand that life is not easy, and when people feel helpless and despair of their situation, we can feel sorry and empathetic.

On the other hand, if we are able to **gain a bit of insight into our minds**, and through meditation practice make some progress in controlling and transforming our mind the way we want it, then there is the great potential that not only for our own practice, knowledge, and meditation experience to overcome the problems related to our mind, but also through that knowledge, we have more energy, more courage, and a greater ability to cope with external problems, and therefore reduce those external problems.

In a situation where someone is really trying to annoy or provoke us, if we lose our temper and get angry with that person, then obviously we lose all our peace and happiness. However, if we are able to control our emotions and our thoughts and remain calm and not be mentally affected by that situation, then there is no cause for us to lose our peace and happiness.

You can see that when you experience an adverse or unfavourable situation, it is in your own hands whether

you will be at peace or not, because it is all dependent on your own state of mind, how you mentally react to or perceive that situation.

What we are discussing here can also be regarded as **educating ourselves about our own mind**. By educating our mind, and by putting that knowledge into practice, we can change our mental attitude. For example, we can change our mental attitude of holding hatred towards someone at one moment into one of loving, caring and compassion in the next moment. So you can see that with the change of mental attitude or outlook, our perception of the other people can change from seeing them as an enemy to seeing them as a friend and vice versa.

In relation to this, I can tell you a bit about my personal experience. There was a monk who lived in the same monastery as me. We used to fight a lot. Sometimes we hit on each other on our heads causing severe injuries and scars. However, eventually we became very close and the best of friends. Looking back on my life, it is quite astonishing to note how your thoughts and attitudes can change, so that someone you hated so much can become your best and closest friend.

I have many stories to in my life relating to my relationships with people, mostly to do with enemies or strangers becoming friends but none of friends becoming enemies

We will now do a bit of the usual breathing meditation.

We begin with a relaxed body and then we try to get rid of all outgoing thoughts. You may have the kind of thought which never stays inside but is always going out. Not only that, but the kind of thought that goes out always comes back with a lot of problems and garbage. So you are trying to recognise this thought, and the problems it brings. It is therefore important that after relaxing the body, fully rest the mind inwards by overcoming or getting rid of all outgoing thoughts. Having brought the mind fully inwards, you then direct your focus on inhaling and exhaling.

*Meditation*

And now, as before, hold your mind inside, but direct the focus of your mind onto the sound of the mantra and try not to get distracted by any other objects.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

We now have some time for questions, so please raise your hand if you have a question.

*Question: Is there a difference in the worldview of monks and lay people?*

Of course, there are lots of differences. Their views with respect to the cause of happiness and suffering, and the way to achieve happiness and avoid suffering are different. The lay people's view of life is very materialistic in that they believe that happiness and suffering are primarily conditioned by the external conditions. Therefore, they value material wealth and reputation and pursue these as a way to accomplish happiness.

However, monks and nuns view that true happiness as lying within us and pursuing external things as an impediment to happiness. So they renounce the world

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and join the monasteries or nunneries, which they believe, provides a peaceful environment suitable for accessing the peace and happiness that lies within us all through pursuing spiritual and meditation practice. This doesn't mean that there is a major conflict between the two, for example, that monks do not like lay people or can't get along with them. It is rather a personal decision; people choose the path that is most suited for living a fulfilling life.

In Tibetan, a town or village is called *Grong* which refers to a place where the community of both sexes reside, and cohabitation is permitted. In Tibetan, a monastery is called *dGonpa* which means a place which is isolated from the hustle and bustle of society, and where only ordained people live, and cohabitation is not permitted. Therefore, in the monasteries or nunneries, there are no problems and conflicts related to sexual relationships. From this perspective there is an advantage living there and also monks and nuns dedicate most of their time to spiritual practice. Once I met a guy in St Kilda who said he had been seeing me in the area in numerous times. Then, he asked me if I was a Buddhist monk. I said I was. He then asked if the Buddhist monks were allowed to marry. I said, 'No', to which he said, 'That's no good.'

I think Christianity and Buddhism are only two religions that have orders of monks and nuns, and this makes me think that there must be some connection between the two.

Thanks very much

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo  
Edit 1 by Robyn Ralton  
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering  
Edited Version  
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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་འགྲུབ་པའི་བཀའ་སློབ་ལྟར་།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

31 October 2018

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As usual, please make yourself comfortable and relax your body. It is also important that our minds are at rest and at peace. We may be physically at rest but if our mind is not at rest and is busy with distracting thoughts or any negative states of mind, then we cannot feel at rest. We need to recognise the effect our mind has on our experience and feeling. In fact, how we feel, whether we are happy or unhappy, depends upon what frame of mind we have within us. Therefore, while we find some rest physically, if our mind is also at rest or abiding in virtue, then we can naturally experience a **true sense of peace and tranquillity**.

All religious traditions advocate the value of cultivating a virtuous state of mind and abandoning non-virtuous states of mind. How do we differentiate between these two minds? As we are talking here about our own mind, and our mental attitude, we need to turn our focus inward and observe our own thoughts, and states of mind, so we know the difference between a virtuous and non-virtuous state of mind. **Our best tool is our own intelligence or sense of discrimination**, which we need to observe our thoughts and emotions. A virtuous state of mind results in happiness, and a non-virtuous state of mind results in suffering. Therefore, the defining characteristics between the virtuous and non-virtuous states of mind lie with the consequences of those minds respectively.

If the consequence is desirable and pleasant, we identify the state of mind as virtuous and positive, whereas if the consequence is undesirable and unpleasant, we identify it as non-virtuous and a negative state of mind. From this perspective, we understand that the happiness that we continuously seek stems from a virtuous state of mind, and the unhappiness that we do not want (and try to avoid) stems from a non-virtuous state of mind within us.

Furthermore, on closer investigation, we can understand that, in fact, the main factor that determines our experience, feeling, wellbeing, happiness or suffering, peace or confusion, is within us, our own mental attitude and not the external causes and circumstances of our lives. If we observe how we feel as we experience the various life events and circumstances that we face, we will see that our own mental attitude, way of thinking and outlook has more effect on us and our experiences than the circumstances themselves, regardless of whether they are favourable or unfavourable. Therefore, we can understand the benefits of maintaining a virtuous or positive state of mind in order to find more happiness and reduce suffering. We can do this simply by training our mind.

If we recall from our own experience a certain time or situation where we may be feeling very restless, stressed or anxious, the primary cause for this is most likely some sort of disturbing thought. This disturbing thought can be overwhelmingly powerful and dominating. It can accompany us all the time, spoiling everything we do. It impedes us from

moving ahead or working towards a better future. Because of it we cannot function as normal. The first step to change our situation around is to recognise that the main cause is our disturbing thought.

Next, we need to be motivated and determined to change and clear away that thought. Then, **'how do we get rid of these disturbing thoughts?'** We need to take into account how those thoughts arise. They arise because we look at things in a certain way. This means that if we manage to look at things in a different way, then we can cultivate a different thought that runs counter to the previous thought. Since these two thoughts are mutually exclusive, both cannot be present within us at the same time. To go about cultivating desired positive states of mind and getting rid of unwanted negative states of mind, we **engage in meditation or mind training practice**.

We need to practise meditation consistently over a period of time to see its effect in altering our way of thinking and transforming our negative states of mind into positive states of mind; or increasing positive states of mind and decreasing negative states of mind. A little bit of effort over a short time will not make much difference to our neurotic mind. However, if we understand the mind and the ways and means to training it well, and then engage in a daily meditation practice diligently, we will gradually see its effect in gaining control over our mind. We will gradually notice disturbing thoughts losing their grip on our mind. As a result, we will find more space in our mind for peace, happiness and shining of joy and lucidity from within. These kinds of inner qualities are extremely beneficial because they enable us to live a stable life in a fast-changing world.

**Cultivating knowledge and conviction or faith in this is essential.** We need to recognise that we must understand our mind and make an effort to practise meditation, as well as having a strong belief that it is possible to train our mind. A disturbing thought can be cleared away, but because we harbour it within us for a long time, we become so habituated to it; we hold on to it tightly as if we cannot separate it from us. No matter how forceful the thought is, it is important to recognise that we can decrease its intensity and eventually get rid of it completely.

Generally speaking, if we look at the scale of which direction our mind is leaning more towards, between the positive and negative state of mind - for a lot of us, it may be leaning more towards the negative state. Therefore, if we are beginners in meditation, we have to expect a strong challenge from our unruly mind. As mentioned earlier, we can eventually diminish and win over the negative states of mind through our consistent meditation practice and developing our intellect and knowledge. The term 'meditate' in Tibetan is *gom*, which means to become familiar with or get used to. As literally indicated, to meditate means to familiarise ourselves with a virtuous object. In meditation practice, we direct our mind towards a virtuous object and let it sit there through effort and through applying mindfulness and awareness. In this way, all the distracting thoughts subside. This paves the way for more peaceful and virtuous states mind to arise within us. This is how we can increase our familiarity with positive states of mind while decreasing familiarity with negative states of mind. This is what a meditation practice is all about.

**Meditation is not simply a state of nothingness.** It is rather an awakening of our intellect and knowledge. As a benefit of meditation, we think wisely and act wisely. That's why

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meditation involves us to direct our focus inward, observing and watching our thoughts and emotions. It involves recognising how our thoughts, our mental attitudes, create and shape the world we live in, and pre-determine our experience of it being happy or unhappy, pleasant or unpleasant. Meditation shows us that happiness arises from mind. Similarly, unhappiness arises from mind. Therefore, the key to living a happy life is having a steady, calm and positive state of mind. This we can cultivate through meditation practice.

To have a genuine interest and motivation to practise meditation, we need to recognise the benefits of meditation. And to meditate effectively, we need to understand how to meditate. Just like being successful in completing a project, not only do we need to have a strong motivation with a clear recognition of our goal, but also belief and confidence in how to reach our goal. Similarly, to do well in meditation, we need to have a clear **understanding of meditation in terms of why and how we meditate.**

Talking about knowledge, there are **different levels of knowledge** we must develop along the path. In the initial level, our knowledge is based on or arises from others, listening to others or reading books. This type of knowledge is not enough. So, we need to take it to the next level by making it our own knowledge through fully applying our intelligence and self-analysis of the initial knowledge. In the next level, our knowledge is based on and arises from our contemplation and analysis. Finally, we need to further develop or refine our knowledge so that it is based on and arises from our meditation. In this final level, it becomes our inner realisation and experience. It is important, therefore, to be more inspired and motivated to engage in meditation practice and to do the right thing in order for the practice to be effective.

We should apply the same methodology used in developing knowledge in our approach to meditation practice. First, learn and study meditation well. Next think over it again and again, then check its benefits and relevance to our lives. Finally, we need to practise meditation hard and diligently. With this approach, our meditation practice will benefit us not only while we are meditating, but also while we are not meditating, and we will be able to maintain a calm and positive state of mind. As a benefit of meditation practice, we can say that a person will become stronger, more resilient, more self-confident, live a more stable life, and will not be easily deceived by other people or influenced by the outside world. Relating to this the Lord Buddha said, **'you are your own protector and saviour;** other than yourself, who else can be your protector and saviour. Subduing your own mind is the way to bring about happiness.'

I am saying that we generate two types of mind - virtuous and non-virtuous states of mind. A virtuous state of mind is something that we should possess and rely upon. A non-virtuous state of mind is something that we should not possess and rely upon. Think of them like we choose our friends. We won't knowingly choose people who are bad natured as our friends unless we are foolish or stupid. We will choose good people as our friends. So, the above quote by the Lord Buddha resonates along the same lines in saying we have a choice in choosing between virtuous and non-virtuous states of mind.

We will now do our usual breathing meditation. Begin with choosing a comfortable sitting posture and relaxing our body. Let go of all distracting thoughts. As our mind begins to settle

within us, as all the distracting thoughts subside, we will begin to feel a state of vacuum within us. Try to remain in that state for a little while or until just before your mind wanders off outside. Then begin a breathing meditation by directing the mind to fully focus on the inhaling and exhaling of the breath, without being distracted by other objects.

*(meditation)*

We will continue the meditation with the chanting of the Buddha's mantra. Again, we maintain the focus inwards. However, as we chant, we simply direct our mental focus on to the sound of the mantra.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

There's room for a question. Please raise your hand if you have a question.

*Question: If my dying friend is a Christian, is it ok to say Buddhist prayers for my friend to find a good rebirth in future?*

*Answer:* You can do the Buddhist prayers or Christian prayers, both are good. It doesn't matter that the two religions have different views on the future life. As you know according to Buddhism, sentient beings can take rebirths in any of the three realms of samsara or achieve liberation from samsara. Therefore, you can pray for the good rebirth and subsequent attainment of the liberation. Alternatively, I believe according to Christianity, after death, people can either go to heaven or hell, so of course, we should pray for them to go to heaven. I don't see Buddhist prayers contradicting that.

*Question: My question relates to the use of the terms 'transforming the mind' and 'getting rid of the negative state of mind'. Do we need to recognise the mind that needs to be got rid of?*

*Answer:* Maybe the question is more to do with the contextual meaning of the English words. We normally say we need to abandon or purify or get rid of negative or non-virtuous states of mind. 'Abandon or purify' here means sterilising the non-virtues so they can't produce results or preventing them from yielding their result, which is suffering.

We can purify the specific negativities that we can remember or recognise that we created, as well as purify those negativities that we don't remember or recognise having created, such as negativities we created in past lives. Therefore, it is not necessary to recognise the negativity in order to be able to purify or abandon it.

All are good questions and I hope my explanations are relevant to your questions.

Thank you.

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor  
Edit 1 by Sandup Tsering  
Edit 2 by Cynthia Karena  
Edited Version*

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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཕམ་ལུ་ལམ་རིམ་འབྲིང་བ་བཞུགས་སྟོན།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

7 November 2018

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As usual please begin by fully relaxing your body. Not only am I advising you to relax, but I must also relax. If we all sit in relaxed way, then together we create here a peaceful and relaxed atmosphere, don't we?

It also helps us to feel more inspired and motivated to do certain things if we know it is only for a very short time. So we should also have the thought that our meditation is only for a very short duration. It's possible that we also feel more motivated when someone else advises you to do things, so sometimes it's good if the meditation is guided by another person. Alternatively, you can guide it yourself by conversing with yourself, such as saying your own name and then saying; 'you need to relax, this is a time for relaxing, stop wandering everywhere, be calm, be calm.'

There is no doubt that we all wish to enjoy true peace, and relaxation, and joy, all the time, but we don't actually experience that, we can't find it all the time. So the question is, what is impeding it? I always say that if we look at the reality of our own existence, or what it is constituted of, then we find that it is constituted of something we call it body, my body, and something else that we call a mind, my mind, and another thing that we call me, I, or self. These three aspects - my body, my mind, and I - always go together, they exist together and accompany each other. So there is a close inter-connectedness between these three things.

The role of the mind is particularly very influential in pre-determining the wellbeing of the 'I' and the body. We can see that if the mind is restless, or agitated, or lacking peace and happiness, and not behaving properly, then even if the 'I' and the body need rest, they cannot get it. We need to ensure that we have a calm and positive state of mind in order to find true peace and happiness and even to feel relaxed in our body too. Without doing anything to calm our mind, then whatever other things we do to find peace and happiness may be futile.

It is essential for us is to know, and to be educated about, the true cause of happiness, which is what we want, and the true cause of suffering which we do not want.

It's not that we are not already trying to find happiness and to avoid suffering, in fact, we may indeed be trying hard to do that, but it's just that we cannot find the peace and happiness that we are looking for, and instead, there seem to be unending problems. Our situation clearly illustrates that we are not tackling the true cause of suffering, and we are not working on creating the true cause of happiness, and we can also see that we have been misled by some sort of inner delusion or confusion.

As we were just saying, in reality, our mind is the main source of the happiness that we want, as well as suffering that we do not want, but we don't view that way. Instead, we view external things and events as the main source for all our experiences. For example, whenever we are unhappy or feel down, we tend to look for the causes externally, something to blame it on. Whereas, in fact, the main cause lies within us, the main cause is our own mind. If we check within, we can relate the main cause to a state of mind, we can recognise that state of mind as the culprit. So really the blame goes to the mind as a primary cause of all the turbulence that we go through in our life, all the unwanted things that we experience. Therefore, the key here is to recognise that unless we do something to eliminate or undo or overpower, the unruly and unsubdued mind within us, we cannot really find true peace and happiness no matter what else we do, or achieve, in our life.

Then the question is: is it possible to overpower or eliminate that unruly mind? Although we experience the mind as if it is overpowering or ruling us, actually the mind is under our control. Therefore, to think or believe that the mind is above us is a delusion and is wrong. In terms of the three aspects of mind, body, and I, the I is like the owner or controller, and the other two are owned by the I. This is clear to us from the phrases we use all the time, such as 'my mind, and my body.' These phrases indicate that the 'I' is the owner and the mind and body are owned. So the 'I', as the owner, should be able to do whatever it wants to, with the things that it owns, and indeed those phrases indicate that we do have the capacity to rule our own mind.

Then how are we going to do that? How are we going to bring our mind under control? The answer is, through the meditation practice, as the practice of meditation is really about subduing the unsubdued mind. The true peace and happiness that we are talking about, manifests and flows from within us as we settle all the disturbing thoughts and emotions.

No matter what we accomplish, and how much we succeed, externally, if we lack inner peace and happiness, then we are not going to be happy and satisfied with our lives, instead, we would feel that we have no meaning and purpose in our life. From this perspective, we can understand and acknowledge the importance of having sustainable peace and happiness within us, and how important and precious that is. Our purpose of life then should be achieving that inner peace and happiness. All our actions and activities should be directed towards achieving that, and through this, we will feel that our life is fulfilling and meaningful.

In order to recognise, and verify, that our experience of happiness or unhappiness primarily derives from our mind, from within us, we need to understand our mind and its influence over our feelings. We can develop this understanding by continuously observing our mental continuum. As we do this, we will note that whenever a positive state of mind arises, or is present within us, as a direct effect of that mind, we feel happy, calm, and relaxed. On the other hand, whenever there is a negative state of mind, as a direct result of that mind, we will feel

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unhappy, miserable, disturbed, and restless. This clearly shows us that if we want happiness, we need to cultivate and maintain a positive mental attitude, and if we don't want misery, we need to get rid of negative mental attitudes. Therefore, our focus on enhancing peace and happiness, and reducing suffering and dissatisfaction in life, is within our mind. That is very important.

Usually when we get disturbed emotionally, when we get upset and unhappy, we tend to relate the cause to external things, such as other people or some changed circumstance. We then get into the battle of trying to win them over and change them, and I have to say that trying to change other people, and trying to change the world, is quite a frustrating and huge task, and one that's not going to bring true peace and happiness at the end anyway.

As stated before, considering that the primary cause of our peace and happiness is our own state of mind, then the more positive states of mind that exist within us, means that we are happier and more relaxed. And more steadiness of our mind means we are more stable with our life, whereas more negative states of mind mean that we become more disturbed or unhappy or paranoid. So the key to bringing happiness, or to reduce unhappiness, is within us, it is not out there. In a way that's good news for us because it means that we can find it, whereas if the key is in the outside world, such as with some other person, then we have a big problem. Therefore, we don't always have to fight with other people to overcome our problems; we can overcome a lot of our problem simply by calming our mind and altering our mental attitude.

Essentially all our actions throughout our whole life take place on two levels; in thought or in deed, and of the two, thought is more important. Thought predetermines, and shapes, and drives deeds. If the thought is positive, the deed will be positive too. If the thought is negative, the deed will also be negative. The negative-ness or positive-ness can be defined in terms of the outcome being desirable or undesirable. And we can also speak of neutral thought or deed.

Meditation practice can help us to understand our mind, and to develop self-awareness, and through this, to develop the skill to subdue the mind. We have discussed the importance of achieving a calm, and happy, and stable state of mind, and we may think that we understand it, and that's why we don't take it that seriously in terms of putting it into practice.

In fact, it is not as simple to understand as we think. Looking into our mind, looking within ourselves, we probably know that we are not really happy; we see that we have much confusion, and many distracting thoughts, and we can feel that we are under a great deal of pressure. Yet we say to ourselves that things are okay, sometimes we even ignore clear symptoms of serious problems, we pretend that we are happy and that everything is going smoothly. In this way, life goes on, and we pass our time wandering here and there.

However, if suddenly we confront an adverse or unbearable situation, then at that moment we get completely overwhelmed and shocked. At that moment, our knowledge of meditation can be too remote, and even

if it is there, we will find it extremely difficult to apply it, and we will find ourselves in a very helpless situation where we can't think properly, and we experience deep pain and suffering. We will find that external things, such as having a nice house, plenty of food and drink, clothing, friends and so on, cannot reduce our suffering, none of this helps to overcome the suffering that we are undergoing. In those moments, we understand the failure of material conditions, and also we may not have the spiritual resources, but even if we do, we find it extremely difficult to apply them.

Before you confront any adverse situations, if you have already given thought to, or are familiar with, the practices of thought transformation and meditation, then certainly you will be less susceptible, and better equipped, to face the external challenges of the life. When we talk about hardship and difficulties in our life, how much we can endure depends to a large degree on our mental attitude. With increased tolerance and patience within our mind, we are far better prepared to overcome difficulties, and not to be so affected by them. Through our meditation practice we can increase our mental courage, determination, and hope so that no matter what happens in the outside world, we can maintain our inner peace, stability, and happiness.

I will stop here, and we will do the usual breathing meditation. Make sure that you feel comfortable and fully relaxed in your body. Try to let go of all the distracting thoughts. Despite your efforts, if your mind is not settling down, then try to recognise that unsettling thought. Once you have identified it, then you say to it; 'you are the main cause of bringing disturbances and harm to my life and stealing all my peace and happiness'. You can then say to it; 'now I won't let you disturb me'. In this way try to generate a strong motivation to get rid of that thought. With this motivation, you begin the meditation, which is simply to focus on the incoming and the outgoing breath, without being distracted by any other objects.

*Breathing Meditation.*

We continue the meditation with chanting the Buddha's mantra, and now you just need to switch the focus of your mind onto the sound of the mantra as we chant it.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

This is the end of the talk tonight but if you have any questions please feel free to ask. Are there any questions?

*Question:* I have a question relating to the relationship of 'I' and mind. Between them, the 'I' is said to be the controller, and the mind is the controlled. And then later on it is said that the mind overrules us. I am just wondering then what is the 'I' in the context of our discussion?

*Answer:* Referring to your first question, when we talked about the 'I', the mind, and the body, and the 'I' as the owner or controller, we are talking about the 'I' which is the conventionally existent 'I', the 'I' that exists relatively. This is the 'I' that when we say to ourselves that I am going to bed, that I am doing this and that, the 'I' which goes to sleep, that does things, we call it the relative or conventionally existent 'I'. We are not talking of the

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negated 'I', or self, in the context of the Buddhist doctrine of selflessness.

Your next question relates to our discussion about how our mind or thought predetermines our actions and in that sense can overpower us. Even though the 'I' is the ruler, the mind can act as a ruler. If the mind that acts as a ruler is a bad one, then we get into a lot of suffering because of it. That's why we need to learn about how to subdue or control the mind. Think of the 'I' as the king and our various types of mind as ministers.

*Question:* What is the wisdom that overcomes anger?

*Answer:* If you talk about permanently eliminating mental afflictions, then we have to uproot the afflictions. The wisdom which has the capacity to uproot mental afflictions is the wisdom that realises emptiness, the ultimate nature of things. This wisdom directly counteracts or opposes ignorance in relation to ultimate reality. With that ignorance, we grasp at things as having an intrinsic self, and from there arises all the mental afflictions.

Just to give a quick overview of the Buddhist presentation of how to achieve the cessation of suffering, first, we have to recognise true suffering. And then just as all other things, we also have to understand that there are causes for suffering. There are two true causes of suffering, the mental afflictions or delusions, and karma. Karma results from mental afflictions. There are many types of mental afflictions and the root of all types of afflictions is the ignorance with respect to the ultimate reality, which is ignorance of self-grasping. That is the root cause. This way of tracing the root cause of suffering, to the ignorance of self-grasping, is a unique doctrine of Buddhism.

From the above, we can understand that if we abandon self-grasping, then we achieve the cessation of suffering, the truth of cessation. Then there is the question of if it is possible to destroy or abandon the ignorance of self-grasping. It is possible because this view is untenable, it cannot be validated by logical reasoning, and it lacks the support of valid cognition. According to the ignorance of self-grasping, things exist inherently and independently, however, this is not the case in reality. If we check how things seem to exist to our perception, they seem to exist inherently from their side. This very much reflects an ingrained ignorance within us with regard to the way things exist in reality. In reality, things are dependent arisings. As we probe into the way things exist in reality and begin to enlighten ourselves with the knowledge that things are empty of an inherent existence, the ignorance will diminish, and can even be uprooted through meditation.

From the point of our own experience, we can also trace how all our karma and delusions are rooted in this ignorance. Deep down we all have a sense of 'I', which we experience spontaneously, and very much on an instinctive level. We can feel that sense of 'I'. Not only it is there, but we also grasp at that self. Due to grasping at that self, we then automatically generate desire for any objects that we perceive as attractive or desirable, and we generate aversion for any objects that we perceive as unattractive or undesirable. Similarly, we generate a close

feeling of attachment to friends, and hatred to enemies. We can observe that the stronger the force of our grasping at the self, then likewise the force of the delusions or mental afflictions that are derived from this are stronger. And then this strong force of the delusions is a stronger driving force with which we engage in creating karma. That is how sentient beings are subject to the perpetual cycle of birth and death, which we call samsara.

So it is very important to observe our experience of this sense of 'I' deep down within us and to see how we, or 'I', exist to that sense of 'I', in order to realise the wisdom of selflessness. We can talk about a relative 'I', which is the reference to the 'I' when we say I am eating and so on. That 'I' does exist, and it is the doer of the actions. However, when we talk of the 'I' in the context of the doctrine of no-self or no 'I', then we are talking about the 'I' that needs to be rejected in order to gain the wisdom of emptiness. The negated 'I' indicates an independent or inherent self, which is a false mode of existence of things.

We can observe different types of 'I' in our experience, for example when your friend or partner has done something totally against your wishes, and you find it very annoying, you will get very angry, and you may say to him or her, 'I am not happy with that or I don't agree with you.' At that moment if you check, what sort of 'I' is it that you experience, and how does it exist. You will find the 'I' has a very concrete reality of its own, existing independently and inherently. This very much fits into the negated 'I' as apprehended by the ignorance of self-grasping. You will even find experiences of such an 'I' very disturbing to your mind and emotions. Whereas when we say to a friend, 'that's wonderful, I like it', in this context the I is more like one that is relatively existent, and it does not particularly affect your emotions to go high or low, nor have an effect on influencing your mental attitude.

*Question:* If you have overcome all the delusions and everything, and nothing will affect you, then you won't get afflicted by the other person?

*Answer:* No, after you have overcome delusions from their root, they will never arise. There is a text which gives the example of three beings looking at a beautiful woman. Each one of them has a different perspective; to a lustful man she is an object of his lustful desire, to an adept meditator, who perceives everything as unattractive and filthy, she is just a skeleton, and to a dog, she is just flesh for food. Our perspective of things changes just as our feelings towards others also changes. We could have an attachment to a person, and then later on hatred towards the same person and vice versa.

Thank you.

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo  
Edit 1 by Sandup Tsering  
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Edited Version  
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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

14 November 2018

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Relax and make your body comfortable.

Along with a relaxed body, it is wonderful if we have a mind which is calm, clear, joyful and relaxed.

Since our mind has the habit of wandering after various objects and doesn't remain on its own course, we need to train it to rest. For this we require knowledge, skill and experience. We also need to be very clear about why we need to have a calm and happy mind.

Generally speaking, we all want happiness and do not want suffering. Everything we do throughout our lives is for achieving happiness and reducing suffering. However, we do need to remind ourselves of what we are trying to achieve from the myriad of activities that we undertake. Having recognised our goal, the next question is whether our actions are the appropriate ones for realising that goal. In this way we can minimise the waste of our time and energy and ensure that whatever we do brings us closer to our desired goal. It is important to make the best use of our wisdom and knowledge when making decisions and undertaking actions to achieve our goal.

In relation to this, Shantideva's *Bodhisattva's Way of Life* says, 'Those desiring to escape from suffering hasten right toward it. With the desire for happiness, out of delusion they destroy their own happiness as if it were an enemy.' This quotation means that even though beings do not want suffering, they create the cause of the suffering as if it is something they want. What they want is happiness, but what they do destroys happiness as if it is their enemy.

There is no doubt that what we all want in our life is happiness, and what we do not want is suffering. Paradoxically what we do creates the opposite of what we are hoping it will achieve. Our everyday actions, hinder the achievement of our immediate needs, let alone our long-term goals. Our wisdom can see the huge gap between what we do and what we seek, and the obvious errors or mistakes in our deeds. In particular, our focus here is to understand the correct mental factors that lead to happiness in our life. Our experience shows that the happiness we seek in our life is not something we can buy from others or achieve automatically with some sort of success or external accomplishment. There is also an internal cause of happiness, which, in fact, is a more important cause than the external one. The internal cause of happiness is having a calm and happy mind. If our mind is not contented and calm, but is disturbed, nothing we do or have in life will bring happiness or satisfaction.

It is important to examine why there seems to be no end to suffering and no increase of happiness in our life despite all our efforts. It may be the case that we increase our suffering and decrease our happiness even though what we want is happiness and not suffering. With this goal, we may have been working hard, dealing with challenges, day in and day out for months and years. Along the way, we might have been successful in accomplishing some things. Furthermore, if we take into account the amount of effort and sacrifice that we have made, there should be no reason why we have not achieved more of the happiness we want and less of the suffering we don't want.

Unfortunately, that is not the case. We can see here that something is not right. Something has gone wrong in our life. If we measure our achievement and hardship against the kind of happiness that we seek, then we have failed. In some cases, it could be worse. We can learn from this that material success does not necessarily bring happiness and satisfaction. We can also learn that all our effort in life is primarily focused on external success or favourable external conditions. We are not saying that favourable external conditions are not needed, but that we focus only on external pursuits and totally neglect the wellbeing of our mind.

As a result, even if you have found good external living conditions, you may not have the same level of satisfaction and happiness mentally. Internally you may feel very empty and unhappy. In fact, some happiness you had in the past might have evaporated like a rainbow. We can learn here that just as good external conditions are important, good internal conditions are also very important for happiness. In fact, happiness is derived more from the right causes within our mind than from external causes. That's what meditation practice is all about.

True peace and happiness are more than meeting our external needs. We find peace and happiness in good external conditions only if our mind is also in that condition. If our mind is not contented with our situation, we won't have happiness. If our mind is preoccupied with agitation and worrying thoughts, we won't have happiness and peace.

I am saying this thing to you because, from my own experience, I know it's true. I have spent a great deal of time studying Dharma and meditation. Sometimes it was tough because I did not have good external conditions. However, I put up with them happily, knowing that my studies would benefit me more in long run. I now understand clearly that I made the right decision. I have aged a lot and I know that I get amazing benefits from my Dharma knowledge and practice. I am speaking about what I find most beneficial in my life. It is really very important that we work on creating the causes of happiness both on the mental and material levels side by side.

We have to work and earn money for our livelihood and for the comforts of our life. However, that alone is not enough to guarantee us the peace and happiness that we seek. It is important that we take good care of our spiritual or mental and physical health. I advise people,

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especially in the early stage of their life, to acquire a good education and work hard to invest enough wealth.

At the same time, I advise people to invest a portion of their time in learning about spirituality and trying to practise it as much as possible, so they know how to handle their emotional and mental crisis and how to calm their mind if it is too disturbed or agitated. In this way, later on there will be no financial problems preventing you from doing whatever you want. Since you will not have any financial problem and will be familiar with the practice of bringing your mind under control, you can be assured that, your experience of peace and happiness will be fuller. You won't have problems on a material, or mental level, such as the suffering of loneliness and attachment.

If our mind is disturbed, good material conditions don't bring joy and happiness. Sometimes the material conditions seem to add more suffering. In addition to good external conditions, if you are mentally able to maintain a calm and a contented state of mind, you will find a sense of happiness and comfort arising from the good conditions within your mind and from your livelihood. You will feel happy and joyful and the people around you will also see you as a happy and joyful person.

People who live a stable, peaceful and joyful life make friends with others easily because other people enjoy their companionship. We can also notice that they are considerate of and helpful to others. They possess many admirable traits that easily attract other people, so they are never short of friends and receive help and support from others whenever there is a need.

When we look at the cause of their qualities, particularly why other people like to be around them and be helpful to them it is because they recognise a very good-natured mind, which is calm, joyful, friendly and caring. Therefore, I always say, if you have to value things, there is nothing which is more valuable than the quality of love and kindness within our mind.

Conversely, the primary source of unending problems also lies within us. For example, if we do not control desire, it can be an unending source of dissatisfaction and frustration no matter what we achieve in life. As a mental factor, desire cannot be fulfilled. The more we have the more we crave. A true sense of satisfaction and contentment arises only if we are inwardly contented with whatever we possess. Regarding this, a great bodhisattva Thogme Sangpo says, 'If you know how to be contented with whatever you possess, you will be satisfied and will not suffer from accumulating or protecting(wealth).'

*Question to student:* What does agitation mean?

*Answer.* It means an unstable mind.

The other day I was looking at various photos that Nicole took at an exhibition in Singapore. Tenzin spotted one image, which he said was the image of the Dhammapala goddess, Palden Lhamo. He was right. I was very impressed with him for recognising the goddess and saying the name so clearly in Tibetan. He is showing signs of an awakening lineage.

Meditation practice is a kind of mental training to settle our mind. If we become familiar with bringing the mind inward and resting it during meditation, then we can apply the same technique whenever we want. We then ensure that whenever we take a break from our busy life, our mind is also resting. Our mind needs training to sit calmly and quietly, because it is not used to that. It is more used to wandering off and being agitated by various thoughts and objects. Meditation practice helps to break that habit of wandering and bring about a stable, calm and focussed state of mind.

We will now begin our usual meditation. The object here is the inhalation and exhalation of our breath. The meditation object we choose should not cause any delusions or mental afflictions to arise. In meditation practice we place or fix our mind on the object, which here is the incoming and outgoing breath. We begin with emptying our mind of all external distractions. Having brought the mind inward let it abide by directing all our mental attention single-pointed focus on the object and preventing it from going to any external objects. We will begin the meditation now.

*(Pause for meditation).*

We will continue the meditation with chanting the Buddha's mantra. Again, we make sure that we keep our mind within ourselves and as we begin the chanting, we focus on the sound of the mantra without getting distracted by any external objects.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Kho*

*Edit 1 by Sandup Tsering*

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*Edited Version*

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that, in order access it, we need to counteract mental delusions and disturbing thoughts.

Despite this fact, we should apply the meditation practice as an alternative means of achieving happiness and avoiding suffering. In meditation practice, we need to say to ourselves, 'I am going to discipline my mind on a given object and prevent it from going after external distractions. In particular, I will counteract mental delusions or afflictions.' Essentially, we have the freedom and opportunity to do whatever we like. We have a choice to try meditation practice as a means to bring about the peace and happiness we constantly seek. Then, whenever we engage in meditation practice, we should follow it sincerely, wholeheartedly and diligently. Then, we might receive what meditation practice offers us—a feeling of peace and happiness from within, without depending on any external objects of distraction or being influenced by mental delusions.

We can then benefit from meditation, not only in terms of the improved wellbeing of our mental state but also in terms of our improved physical health. Therefore, it is important to understand that we shouldn't always seek peace and happiness through external distractions. This may provide some immediate pleasure or gain but, in the long run, sometimes it brings more suffering and loss. We may, for example, end up with chronic mental suffering.

We will also find meditation practice useful in expanding our knowledge, broadening our mental outlook and dealing with various mental or emotional crises. If the cause of our problem is related to the mind, then really the solution or the way to fix it lies within the mind. For example, if the cause is a certain thought or emotion, then we have to remedy it. This involves cultivating a different kind of thought or emotion. Just as we feel low self-esteem and even depression due to a certain mental attitude, likewise, by cultivating another kind of mental attitude we can boost our self-esteem and confidence. In a way, we have a choice and the potential to modify our thoughts, deeds and personality.

There are people who do not know or who are unaware of the fact that mentally or emotionally related problems need to be dealt with mainly by the person understanding their own mind and emotions. When they confront problems, they are very helpless; so much so that other people also feel helpless when they try to support them. Unfortunately, they simply have to undergo the suffering caused by their own mind and emotions.

However, those who have come to understand the true cause of restlessness, suffering and unhappiness should try to deal with the cause as a remedy. They should not simply feel helpless or hopeless. They should direct their focus inward; reflecting and trying to recognise the cause of a certain neurotic thought or an afflictive emotion. In this way, at least they can see it is possible to eliminate it. By reflecting on our own experience, we can clearly recognise the effect of a negative or disturbing thought; how it makes us feel down and sad and how, through our facial expression, this becomes noticeable to other people.

Likewise, other people can recognise if we are in a good mood through our facial expression.

The key to solving our problems is mind training. To overcome certain thoughts, we train our mind to have a different perspective or we ponder a different object. If you are feeling hopeless, have low self-esteem and lack confidence, then you should reflect on things which boost and increase your self-confidence and worthiness. You should reflect on the fact that you are no different from any other human being. You have the same potential and the same right to achieve happiness and eliminate suffering.

As mentioned earlier, a lot of the problems we experience are created by our own mind or are due to a certain way of thinking. Therefore, if we consider the remedy to these problems, then we will find that really, meditation is the only true remedy. If we try meditation, we will actually find it very effective. As a result of our familiarity with meditation practice, we will find how easy it is to overcome mentally related problems. We cannot escape from the world and from various situations. For instance, we have to go to work and face various stressful situations. The thing is that sometimes we bring work related problems home. This is okay if we do something, such as meditation practice, to overcome it. Otherwise, we feel unhappy and stressed at home too and the next day we head to work in the same unhappy mood. If we continuously suffer the same thing over a long period of time, our situation may become critical in terms of our mental and physical health. Therefore, we should understand that meditation has the potential to benefit us throughout our whole life.

In our everyday life, we recognise certain activities and things as harmful and unbeneficial and other activities and things as advantageous and beneficial. Based on this, our natural tendency is to accept things which are beneficial and avoid things which are harmful. In a similar fashion, in meditation practice we can see that certain states of mind or thought processes are beneficial. We need to cultivate and habituate ourselves with these states of mind. We can also see states of mind that are harmful to our wellbeing, peace and happiness. These we need to diminish. So in this way, meditation helps us to increase our intelligence and the wisdom to be able to know precisely the difference between things to accept and things to avoid. Our lives should be guided by such wisdom and knowledge.

Now, we will start the usual breathing meditation. Again, just make yourself comfortable and relaxed. Having fully relaxed our body we cultivate the intention that the reason we are engaging in this meditation is to overcome the mental delusions overpowering our mind. We generate a strong motivation with a sense of aversion to mental delusion and we say to it, 'I won't let you overpower my mind'. Try to let go of all the distracting thoughts and let the mind just completely settle within yourself. Having done that, we direct the mind solely on the incoming and outgoing breath. We place our full attention on the breath as much as possible, without paying attention to external distractions. As we maintain

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this focus, every now and then we recall the object of meditation – our breath.

*Meditation*

We continue with the chanting of Buddha's mantra. We direct our mental focus on the sound of the mantra as we chant. As before, retain the focus there as much as possible without losing it to any external objects.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

If you have any questions, I give you that opportunity, otherwise I will have a vacation.

*Q1. What is the difference between the seed and imprint?*

In the context of mental afflictions or delusions, the seed is something which has the potential or capacity to produce the mental delusions. For example, a seed of wheat has the capacity to produce wheat. Whereas, the imprint, or sometimes we use the term latency, is different. The imprint or the latency of delusion doesn't serve as a cause to produce a mental delusion. The imprint serves as a cause to manifest some sort of dualistic appearance or conception which is regarded as a cognitive obstruction. An example is the smell in a pot. The pot can be clean but the smell in it makes it unsuitable to use.

*Q2. What about the seed and the imprint of self-grasping?*

With respect to the ignorance of self-grasping, its seed and imprint are different. You can have someone who has eliminated or uprooted self-grasping but not the imprint. Due to the imprint the person will experience a certain kind of subtle dualistic appearance. For example, someone who has not overcome the imprints of self-grasping will visually perceive things to have an inherent existence. For example, when you look at this flower with your eye sense-consciousness, it appears to have an independent existence; an existence from its own side without depending on anything else. It appears to have its own intrinsic qualities as its ultimate mode of existence.

So that's why we say that the eye sense consciousness is a mistaken consciousness because it has been stained or afflicted by the imprint of self-grasping. It is like when you go to sleep and you have a dream in which things are not true. The mistaken appearance in the dream is caused by or afflicted by the sleep. Another example to describe the falsity of things is the magician's illusion. A magician uses a certain kind of mantra spell or puts stuff into some liquid. This then causes the spectators in the audience to mistakenly see various objects such as a horse on the stage. However, spectators who are not affected by the magician's trick cannot see the conjured objects.

We can also talk about the seed of attachment or desire. If you have not overcome or abandoned the seed of desire, then when the seed meets the right conditions you will produce attachment or desire. So, unless you remove its seed, desire can arise.

Have I answered your question? Someone from Adelaide once wanted to come down to Melbourne to see me because he had some question. I advised him to take the

question to his local resident lama at his centre. But for some reason he wanted to see me, so he flew down to Melbourne. I advised him to bring the question to the Wednesday night teaching. So, at the end of the teaching I asked him for his question. The guy replied he didn't need to ask it because it was already cleared up.

So thank you everyone for your very good attention to the teaching.

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo*

*Edit 1 by Sandup Tsering*

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*Edited Version*

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effect of destroying our peace and happiness, as well as bringing unhappiness, suffering, fear, anxiety, tension and inner turbulence.

In terms of our experience, the destructiveness or disturbance of mental afflictions, such as anger or hatred, is very obvious; whereas that of attachment-desire is less noticeable unless we take into account a strongly obsessive desire. Also, we can notice that people have varying degrees of specific afflictive emotions. This is to say, some people are more prone to anger, others to attachment and so forth.

When any mental afflictions overpower our mind, we will feel down, unhappy and disturbed. At that time, we will lose our self-control, peace and sanity. We should reflect upon the effects of each one of these afflictions. For example, we should think of how we feel when our mind is overpowered by anger. As we think over anger in relation to our experience and anger's potential to destroy our life, we are clearly able to say to ourselves, 'I don't want anger'. If we ask anyone, they will also say anger is bad. It can harm others and us.

However, some people might say anger is good or necessary to feel more courageous when fighting and defeating enemies. It is true that anger can inflate our mind, even with a thought of forsaking our life or the lives of other people in order to defeat enemies. However, anger is a force of destruction. Let's say you are able to greatly harm enemies. But the question is, what have you gained from that? If you think over this further, then you realise you have not gained anything at all, other than causing harm to others, which in fact is also causing you harm. You will find that just as anger has inflicted so much loss and damage on the enemy, it has also done the same to your own life. So, we can see that there is no virtue or benefit whatsoever in holding a mind such as anger. It is important to know or to be able to say to yourself, 'Anger is a destructive force, is of no benefit, but is full of short-comings and something I need to overcome.'

Likewise, if you consider the shortcomings of attachment or desire, particularly strong attachment when our mind is overpowered by it, we will feel as if it has sucked away all our energy, self-knowledge, freedom and willpower. You cannot think properly, nor can you direct your mind to any other objects but just the desired object. You will feel frustrated, depressed, weak, hopeless and feel that there are no future opportunities. You will feel totally confused and deprived of a sense of discrimination of knowing the difference between right and wrong, beneficial and harmful.

Considering all these shortcomings, you need to apply the remedy for afflictive emotions. The remedy to counteract anger and hatred is to meditate on something that opposes anger and hatred, such as cultivating loving kindness. With loving kindness, you are showing genuine care and concern for others, so you do not want to harm them; whereas with anger, you hate or want to harm others. Therefore, if we meditate on loving kindness, in the sense of getting our mind acquainted with warm-heartedness towards other beings, the result is being able to counteract, or diminish the force of anger, and

eventually even completely get rid of it. Similarly, as a remedy to overcoming attachment or desire, we meditate by imagining or deliberately seeing the desired object from the perspective of undesirability and unattractiveness. This imagination or perception directly opposes the perception of the object as being desirable. This way of meditating counteracts attachment and desire.

So, we understand here that meditation practice helps us in counteracting mental afflictions. It enables us to realise our self-potential or make the best use of it. Mental afflictions, on the other hand, hinder us from using our self-potential; instead they enslave us and inflict suffering upon us. It might be too hard for us at the moment to completely prevent any mental afflictions such as anger from arising. However, gaining some understanding that anger, for example, is very bad and harmful is of tremendous benefit. Then, when anger arises within us, we can at least remain cautious by saying to ourselves, 'it is very bad and can be very harmful and destructive to myself and others.' To be aware of the arising anger and recognising it as a negative state of mind shows that we are not totally under the control of anger. Whereas someone who does not have such an awareness of anger being a negative state of mind can easily fall prey to anger and suffer a lot as a result of it, as well as causing suffering to others.

Meditation practice is also like a form of education to learn about our own emotions, thoughts and states of mind, and the various causes and conditions that induce them. For example, as we mentioned earlier, if we mentally perceive or project an object in an unpleasant, undesirable way, we get angry, whereas by perceiving and projecting the same object in a pleasant and desirable way we generate attachment. We can't have attachment and aversion towards the same object at the same time, however, the change from one to the other can occur even in a very short span of time.

Hence, we understand the fact that the type of object and the way we perceive it is an important determining factor for the states of mind and emotions that arise within us. This means that one way of preventing or getting rid of a particular mind or thought is by switching our mind away from the particular object associated with that mind or thought.

Therefore, I advise people that if they feel anger towards some other person, then they should try to not focus their mind on that person, they should rather try to focus their mind on the anger that arises and that they feel within themselves. We will find that shifting the object of our mental attention is very effective in getting rid of any unwanted states of mind, as well as bringing us inner calmness.

I say that attachment and aversion are the two main sources of problems throughout our entire life. We suffer because we are caught in a battle between these afflictive emotions, which rise and subside depending on our way of perceiving and grasping at things as being either pleasant or unpleasant.

In plain language, meditation practice is a means of training our mind to see different ways of thinking or

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looking at things. So, we are never short of topics for meditation. Meditation is all to do with our mind; it's a skill or technique for modifying or changing our way of thinking. To overcome desire, we train our mind to perceive an object in an opposite way from our usual perception of that object of desire; we just have to train our mind such as imagining or thinking of it in an unpleasant way that is the opposite of desire. Likewise, to overcome anger or hatred we have to perceive the object from the perspective of its pleasantness or desirability. By training our mind in this way, through meditation practice we can at least prevent or extinguish the manifested form of anger.

Before we begin our usual breathing meditation, please bear in mind that we should always start this meditation with a relaxed body. We then need to direct our attention to our mind and try to overcome all distracting thoughts. We should note that our usual mind is very unstable because it always tends to go from object to object. It never wants to sit but is continuously on a trip. It has the bad habit of not settling down or being content with the things that we have. It rather tends to fantasise or go after things that we don't possess or with places that you have never been. As a result, it makes us exhausted, stressed, agitated, frustrated and unhappy. It also uses up our energy and burns us out.

Realising this, we should try to relax the mind inward after relaxing our body, by letting go of all distracting thoughts. However, our mind relies on objects for its existence, because the mind is a phenomenon that is a subjective thing or an object possessor. So, therefore in this meditation, you introduce your incoming and outgoing breath as an object for the mind, and thereby ensure that your mind simply focuses on the incoming and outgoing breath without being distracted by any external objects. With this in mind, we will begin the meditation now.

*(Pause for breathing meditation).*

We now continue with the chanting of the Buddha's mantra. So again, as we chant the mantra just focus on the sound of the mantra, and just make sure that your mind is not distracted by any external objects.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNI YE SOHA

Thank you for your very good attention to the teaching.

It is good to engage in meditation practice because you will find it is very effective in bringing about peace and relaxation within your mind. Scientific research has also found that mental peace and happiness supports or facilitates better physical health too. This is now commonly accepted. Even those people who have a serious physical health issue should practise meditation so that at least they are not adding more to their health problem by mentally worrying about their health too much.

It has been found that those patients who mentally worry too much are just adding more suffering to their existing physical pain and suffering. However, those patients who don't mentally worry too much or who mentally and emotionally manage well recover better, or at least don't

add extra problems to their physical sickness with mental worry.

If we hold a negative or pessimistic view about our situation by thinking, for example, there is no point to living or that there is no happiness in our life, then we end up suffering more and feeling depressed. On the other hand, if we are more accepting of our situation, such as a health problem or any adverse circumstances, and we maintain a positive mental attitude, then we can still mentally and inwardly maintain our peace, sanity and joy. In this way, if patients cultivate a positive mental outlook, then they can still enjoy their lives as much as anyone else.

I come across some people with chronic diseases who mentally are very strong and happy as well. For example, if there is a person who suffers from some eyesight problem, and then if they worry and become anxious about going blind, not being able to see anything, worrying about who will look after them etc., then they will experience traumatic mental problems. This adds more problems for them, which in a way is unnecessary because they are not blind yet. So, we can see here how we can mentally create problems by simply thinking negatively, pessimistically and not checking and controlling our wild mind.

*Transcribed by Kim Foon Looi*

*Edit 1 by Sandup Tsering*

*Edit 2 by Cynthia Karena Edited Version*

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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

5 December 2018

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As usual, we will begin with a relaxed body. If we also have a relaxed and joyful mind together with a relaxed body, then that would be wonderful.

When we experience a relaxed and joyful state in both our mind and body, then we can also feel truly relaxed and happy as a person. Since this experience makes us completely peaceful and happy, we can say to ourselves and to others, 'I feel peaceful and happy.' If we think about it, this is something we need. We have been looking for this and we have found it, therefore this experience gives us some sense of purpose and satisfaction in our life.

Now, if we delve into the reason why we feel peaceful and happy, it is because our mind and body are at rest and in a good condition. You feel good because your mind and body are in a good state. Understanding and recognising this close link between your well-being and the well-being of your mind and body is a very important part of learning meditation and understanding its benefits.

When we talk of happiness, we are talking about the well-being of our mind and body, which is why I always say that after you have relaxed your body, you also need to relax your mind. Your sense of feeling peaceful and happy is contingent upon both the happy mind and body. A happy mind is more important, because without it, you cannot find peace and happiness even if you have found peace and happiness on the physical level. You may be physically at rest but if your mind is preoccupied with restless and troubling thoughts then you can't find peace and happiness. Therefore, what I am saying is that if you are looking for true peace and happiness, then you need to rest your body as well as your mind by overcoming all troubling thoughts. We can understand this by observing our own experiences.

The next step is taking self-responsibility to find true peace and happiness. If we want peace and happiness, then we have the responsibility of controlling our mind and preventing it from being overpowered by disturbing and troubling thoughts. These thoughts cause our restlessness and unhappiness. Without getting rid of them, even if we are physically at rest and in a favourable situation, we cannot experience peace and happiness. Therefore, it is important to recognise that it is our own disturbing thoughts within us that destroy our peace and happiness. No matter what we try to do and change externally, we cannot find true peace and happiness until we fix our unsettled mind. The next question is how can we get rid of these troubling thoughts? First of all, we need to switch our mind from external things and direct

its attention to those thoughts that we generate within us. If we examine them closely we will notice that they reflect our perspectives on things and events, our mental attitudes and our way of thinking. This shows that if we change our way of thinking or our outlook, then our thoughts and emotions will also change.

In our discussion about positive states of mind that benefit us, and negative states of mind that harm us on the mental level and on the physical or material level, what we are saying here is that the mental level is more important in terms of our well-being, particularly by enriching ourselves with a more positive mental attitude. This will bring about true peace and happiness within us, which is the result of the meditation practice. The main benefit or purpose of meditation is to subdue disturbing thoughts and bring about positive mental qualities within us. I would say that the meditation practice, which enables us to achieve happiness and satisfaction from within, is more effective than the material approach, which leads us to pursue external objects as a means to happiness and satisfaction. With regard to the material approach, we can forget about achieving a true sense of satisfaction and contentment; it doesn't even guarantee us a material sense of success. For example, some people may think that if they own a big house or an expensive car, they become rich, but when they have these things, they don't make them rich at all. Sometimes the acquisition of material wealth requires a great deal of sacrifice and hardship, yet the end result does not necessarily secure us more happiness and satisfaction. It is even possible that our material success becomes the main cause of the downfall of our life, instead of adding more meaning to our life. However, if we also develop positive states of mind within us, together with material development, then not only do we live our life happily and peacefully, but we would also be able to direct all our material success - such as wealth, good physical looks and fitness - into favourable conditions to increase our virtue and positiveness. If we lack a positive state of mind and mental attitude within us, then our wealth and external success may become a source of increasing pride, jealousy and competitiveness, which dissipate our own peace and happiness and harm other beings. On the other hand, if we are able to enrich ourselves with good intelligent knowledge and a positive mental attitude through the meditation practice, then our material success can serve as a good tool to transform everything we do into a source of happiness for oneself and for others. However, if we don't do very well in terms of external pursuits, but inwardly we have developed good intelligent knowledge and a positive state of mind, then we can still feel content and satisfied with our lives because inner contentment is not dependent on external factors. The famous Kadampa Geshe Chekawa said that one should only meditate on cultivating excellent qualities within one's mind. This is to imply that the outcome of any effort we make in enhancing inner qualities is definitely a beneficial one.

The benefit of the meditation practice is in accord with our search for peace and happiness as the meaning and purpose of our lives. As I mentioned earlier, we must recognise that the main source of unhappiness and

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restlessness is within us, in the form of negative mental attitudes. Therefore, we engage in the meditation practice to counteract these negative states of mind, but we need to know what meditation is and how it works. One common element of all the meditation practices is familiarising or habituating our mind to a virtuous object. By resting our mind on that object, even for a short period of time, at least at that moment our mind finds true respite from all the disturbing and restless thoughts. It is important for us to meditate regularly. You should put aside a certain time for the meditation practice every day, apart from the time you spend on work and other things. You will notice that your mind will gradually become calmer and develop a positive mental impetus which has the effect of preventing disturbing thoughts to arise. Even if they arise, you will be able to recognise them and be more vigilant against them. If you are not able to be aware of disturbing thoughts such as anger, pride and jealousy and recognise them when they arise, then these thoughts will destroy your happiness and completely overpower your mind. With the lack of such awareness and recognition, instead of remedying or counteracting them, you might hold these disturbing thoughts dearly as if they are precious. As a result, no matter what you do, you will not be able to find peace and happiness or get rid of the mental and emotional crisis that you go through. We should not be like the people who tell me that they have been practising meditation for three years, but ... This implies that meditation is not helping or not working. Meditation practice does work effectively to subdue our mind. Sometimes we do not experience the benefit of the meditation practice immediately, but we still get the benefits. If our mind is too occupied by stressful and anxious thoughts associated with our busy lifestyle, and does not find any moment of peace, self-awareness and relaxation, then eventually our mind can get too worn out and stressed, and the problem can get worse and become more difficult to overcome.

Peace and happiness in our lives primarily arise from within through cultivating positive states of mind, such as love and compassion. I have spent a great deal of time in my life focusing on cultivating love and compassion for others, so I am able to relate from my own experience in this area how beautiful it is to feel love and compassion for other beings. Having love and compassion ensures our mind has a positive mental attitude, whatever we do, whether we stay at home or go out. It gives us a sense of purpose in our life. When we have love and compassion for others, we feel connected to them and we feel good. In contrast, we feel bad and cannot stand being close to others when seeing them induces a negative state of mind, such as anger and hatred. It is important that we maintain the practice of vigilance so that whenever a negative state of mind such as anger arises within us, we recognise it and think about its shortcomings in terms of the harm that it brings to us and others - how it destroys our inner peace and happiness and damages our mental health. We should then say to anger, 'You are a destructive force, you take away my mental peace, stability and clarity, you are not welcome in me.' Similarly, if we generate any other negative states of mind such as jealousy, we should do the same by recognising its presence, shortcomings and

by saying to ourselves, 'I won't fall under your control.' When we say these things, and even if negative states of mind such as anger or jealousy arise, because of our awareness of their presence and their destructiveness, and reinforcing ourselves to counter them, these negative states of mind become less destructive and weaken.

The purpose of the meditation practice is to overcome and counteract negative states of mind. There are some people who ask, 'In what way will meditation or spiritual practice benefit one's life in the workplace?' There is a lot of benefit at work because the practice helps people to develop positive mental attitudes, which are very much needed for efficiency and productivity. Having staff with positive mental attitudes and thinking makes the workplace pleasant for everyone. Otherwise, the workplace can become a miserable, tense and stressful place if the staff are holding rather negative mental attitudes, such as when the staff are jealous towards others who are above them, or get promoted or treated better, showing pride towards those who are below them and competitiveness to their equals. Other negative mental attitudes are impatience and a short fuse. In such a workplace, there will be very low staff morale, and collaboration and support are very unlikely, but there will be suspicion, unnecessary worries, tension and stress. This will make the place very unhappy which naturally affects the work. If you think of each of these mental attitudes such as jealousy, the main result is losing one's own mental peace and happiness, but not causing as much harm to other people.

On the other hand, if you have an understanding and are aware of these negative states of mind, and are determined to counteract them, then you will have a completely different perspective towards others who show such negative attitudes to you. For example, if some colleagues show anger or pride towards you, you won't immediately react to it. You would recognise that as a fault or weakness of that person, as well as feel empathy because you know the person is unhappy about something. You would be able to differentiate the person from his or her faults, and therefore maintain empathy for the person despite his or her negative mental attitude towards you. This shows that we can prevent negative attitudes by cultivating a positive mental attitude. After living here for many years and meeting with people from different walks of life, I have some idea of what people go through in this society. Once someone shared with me the mental agony of feeling jealous towards her own sister because she had a nice boyfriend. Many people undergo suffering which is primarily created by their own unsubdued mind, yet they don't realise this is the cause. The focus of my discourse is for people to understand this, and direct their attention to changing their mental attitudes - changing hatred and jealousy into love and compassion and an altruistic thought of benefitting others. Through meditation and spiritual practice, we need to recognise that feeling jealous towards others who are above us, feeling pride towards those below us, and competitiveness towards those who are equal is the primary source of our suffering in our life at home and in the workplace. These mental attitudes affect our relationship with others. On a national level, these are the

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source of conflict and dysfunction of our own government. Even though the leaders have been elected to manage the whole country, and not to argue with each other, we have observed how the influence of jealousy and pride causes them to waste their time and resources by putting each other down, and how this affects the unity within the government and the management of the important issues of the country. On the other hand, if as an individual person, we maintain the right mental attitude, then we can very easily get along with and become friends with people we meet, regardless of their status.

I am also talking about how to live our life meaningfully. There are certain things that are beneficial and other things that are harmful to us. We need to reflect on these two things, and after reflection, if you agree with me, then my advice relating to those things which are beneficial is to remember them and contemplate them later on. The next thing is to seriously consider implementing them into your life. If something is beneficial, then you need to cultivate and adopt that into your life, whereas if something is harmful to yourself and others, then you need to avoid it. As a way to reinforce your practice, you should think, 'This is something I must remember to prevent and minimise, whereas these things are beneficial to me and others, so I must maintain and develop them'.

We will now do our usual meditation. Without going into details, make sure you feel relaxed physically. Try to get rid of all distracting thoughts and let the mind be fully settled within yourself. Begin the meditation by directing the mind only on the incoming and outgoing breath. We will focus on the breath and try to prevent distracting thoughts as much as possible.

*[Pause for single-pointed meditation]*

We will continue the meditation with the chanting of the Buddha's mantra. As we chant, we try to direct the focus on the sound of the mantra without getting distracted by any external objects.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor  
Edit 1 by Sandup Tsering  
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Edited Version  
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happiness on a mental level by achieving a calm and positive state of mind, then there will be less need, less worry and stress, less anxiety and frustration, and more happiness, and a greater sense of contentment.

Even if we do not possess much materially, we would feel contented, and live a happy life, and be able to say that 'I have everything I need, I am lucky, and I have nothing to complain about in life.' Therefore, I say that when we think about various things that we could possess, the one thing that we should all possess, indeed that we must possess, is the positive state of mind within us. In fact, you will find that it is the most important and beneficial thing that you can possess.

Meditation practice helps us to recognise true peace and happiness within us and helps us to enhance it. We could go into great detail about the reason why we are not able to enjoy inner peace and happiness, but in essence, the main reason is that our mind is under the power of, or in grip of what we call mental afflictions. So really the main purpose of meditation practice is to counter the mental afflictions within us.

In meditation practice, the first and most important thing is to direct our mental focus inward, and at the same time subdue all outgoing thoughts. As said before, the goal of meditation is to enhance positive states of mind and to diminish negative states of mind – both of these states of mind lie within us. Therefore, we must focus our mind inward in order to understand them, to achieve calmness, and to remove the rough and wild mind within us. If our mind is wandering about with distracting thoughts, or overpowered by external distractions, then we cannot meditate. Just as we need to focus on our external needs and facilitate those to improve our material living conditions, we need to turn our focus inward for meditation practice.

Further, I think we need to adopt a realistic approach in whatever we do in our life. Meditation practice is definitely very beneficial to living a happy and meaningful life, so it's worth trying it out. However, as we cannot determine its result by trying it out just a few times, I advise people to include meditation practice as part of their daily activities.

If you practice it regularly, even if it is for a very short time, say five minutes each day, then over a period of time you can notice the benefit it brings to your life. It would be good to find time for a short meditation in the morning, as well as at night. At other times you can decide for yourself what's best suited to you, such as if you have some time off from work you may want to do some extra practice or a longer session. Sometimes you may even be able to find a short period for meditation at your workplace.

Obviously we must work to make ends meet, because without working who will provide us with food, clothing, and shelter? I have some reservations regarding those few people who say they want to give up their job to do full-time meditation. Meditating is not as easy as they think, and besides, there are others who don't work, but they don't do more meditation. I advise people to maintain a balanced life between your personal life, your work, and your meditation or spiritual life.

Another important thing that I often advise people about is to try to cultivate a positive state of mind, so when you wake each morning you think that 'I will be kind, caring, and helpful to others, and I won't do any harmful actions to them.' This positive attitude will influence your actions throughout the day. If you remember to cultivate the same motivation every morning, then eventually you will cultivate it automatically as soon as you wake up.

After this, as mentioned before, do a short meditation to experience inner calm, and think about how to make the day meaningful by maintaining a positive state of mind, such as being helpful, not harmful to all other beings. At the end of the day, if you carry any stress, tension, or anxiety from your work, then try to eliminate this by engaging in meditation practice. It is also good, before you go to sleep, to build a habit of reflecting on how you have spent the day. Rejoice and feel positive in whatever good things you have done through the course of the day, and feel remorse for any misdeeds or harmful actions you may have done and resolve to not repeat them in the future. If you integrate meditation practice into everyday life, regardless of the length of the session, then as time goes by, you slowly make progress, and the practice becomes easier and becomes a habit.

We should also note that in our practice our focus should be inward. We are not necessarily saying that good outer conditions are an impediment to our practice; but good outer conditions can become an impediment to our virtuous practice if we see them as the end result of our actions, rather than as a means to achieve a higher purpose of our life. If we have the right mental outlook, then, in fact, we can transform positive outer conditions as a means of reaching our higher goals. I certainly find the good living conditions that I now enjoy very useful for enhancing my practice of developing virtue and diminishing non-virtues. Good living conditions and circumstances are the result of good karma from the past, therefore if you have found them now then be inspired to create more good karma. Whereas bad living conditions and circumstances are the result of bad karma from the past, so if you meet them now then be inspired to minimise bad karma and to purify it.

If you engage in meditation practice on a regular basis, then even though in the beginning you may have to make a lot of effort and even find it very difficult, it will eventually become part of your daily life. And then, when all this practice that we do becomes part of our daily activities, we can also be in the position to find lasting peace and happiness. And in a sense, if we continue to do this day after day, our life as a whole will be very stable; we will experience a stable life with stable peace and happiness.

Therefore, it doesn't matter whether the situation you are in is good or bad, what is important is your mental outlook. If you have the right mental outlook, then every situation is positive, in the sense that it offers an opportunity to create virtue and abandon non-virtue.

Now we do our usual breathing meditation where we direct all our mental attention onto the incoming and outgoing breath. You begin with a very relaxed body and try, as much as possible, to get rid of all distracting

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thoughts so that your mind is fully settled within yourself. And then you begin the meditation by focusing your mind on the incoming and outgoing breath, and try as much as possible to keep your mind there, rather than being distracted by external objects.

*(Pause for meditation).*

Now as we chant the Buddha's mantra, try to focus the mind on the sound of the mantra, and keep the mind inward without being distracted by external objects.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNI YE SOHA

We have just a little bit of time for questions, so if anyone has a question please raise your hand.

*Question:* When do we do an analytical meditation?

*Response:* Usually analytical meditation is recommended for beginners because actually setting the mind single-pointedly is not easy. When you are doing analytical meditation, it is vitally important that your mind is fully focussed on the topic of your analysis, without any distractions. So from this perspective, analytical meditation is also helping you to develop concentration. In terms of the order of which of the two - stabilising or analytical meditation, to engage in - the analytical meditation is recommended first for beginners, whereas advanced meditators alternate between using analytical and stabilising meditation in their practice.

Having said that, I think it should be left to individuals to decide which of the two meditations best suit their practice and needs. Sometimes, if our mind is too agitated and disturbed, we can't think and do things properly. In this case, engaging in the stabilising meditation might be a good way to calm our mind immediately, which is very necessary sometimes.

Thank you. Are there any other questions?

*Question:* How do you meditate when your mind is overwhelmingly distracted or disturbed?

*Response:* If our mind is too disturbed and too agitated, then the recommended meditation is breathing meditation. Breathing meditation is a very simple technique, which does not require much knowledge, whereas some other meditations can be very complex, which is too hard to comprehend when your mind is disturbed. Breathing meditation is just simply a matter of focusing, or resting your mind, on the inhaling and exhaling of the breath.

One way of doing breathing meditation is, while focussing your mind on the breath, to mentally count the cycles of inhaling and exhaling with the awareness of 'I am breathing in, I am breathing out, then in, then out.' It is said that if you can keep the mental focus on your breathing for the duration of twenty-one cycles, that is counting each inhalation and exhalation as one cycle, then all the disturbing thoughts will be gone, and you will find the mind will be fully abiding within yourself in a state of stillness and clarity.

An example used to describe the nature of the mind is a clear mirror. Just as the mirror can reflect the colour of whatever object is placed in front of it, for example if the object is blue, the blue will reflect in the mirror, similarly

the nature of the mind is clear and pure. By nature, the mind is not rigid or static, but due to certain objects or thoughts, it becomes agitated, and when those objects or thoughts are gone, the clear and pure nature of the mind becomes apparent.

Breathing meditation is also regarded as a preliminary practice prior to the main meditational practice because of its effectiveness in quickly calming the mind. We can also apply breathing meditation any time we need to really calm down. Sometimes we start off a meditation alright, and then later on we might find it very difficult to continue because of the influence of overwhelming distractions or mental afflictions. In such a situation it is good to apply the breathing technique to counteract the distractions and then go back to the meditation. It is said that if we continue the meditation whilst under the influence of mental distractions, then we develop a bad habit of always meditating with distractions, and this habit can eventually become very difficult to overcome.

Both questions are very good. The same questions are raised in many scriptures as well.

Meditation practice is certainly not just sitting in nothingness; rather it should be an awakening, and before an awakening we expect to confront the challenges of doubt and mental delusions. So if any doubts or questions arise in the meditation that is the sign of progress.

Thank you very much.

*Transcribed by Kim Foon Looi*

*Edit 1 by Sandup Tsering*

*Edit 2 by Robyn Ralton*

*Edited Version*

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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Translated by Sandup Tsering

19 December 2018

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Make yourself comfortable and relax. Being able to relax physically as well as mentally, as well as being familiar with mind training will give you a true sense of peace and relaxation.

Mental peace and happiness are more important than physical rest and physical happiness. You may have good physical health, and all the material possessions you need, but if your mind is restless, you cannot be happy. If your mind is agitated, you can end up in all sorts of unwanted places, even in the most favourable surroundings.

Through the investigation of my own and others experience I can say with confidence that the single most important factor for peace and happiness in our life is a calm and positive state of mind. That is why I always focus my Dharma talk on cultivating peace and happiness.

The purpose of our existence is finding happiness and we alone are responsible for achieving this goal. Therefore, we should always check that our current action is helping us to achieve our goal. If it is neutral in terms of achieving our purpose, maybe it is not too bad. However, if it goes against achieving our goal, which is to say it harms our physical and mental well-being, then we need to seriously reconsider what we are doing. It is up to each individual to create the causes for happiness in their life.

We all have a unique human intelligence. It is very important to tap into the ability to discern between right and wrong and identify what is beneficial and harmful. We should always check to ensure that our activities are aimed at benefiting other beings, or at the very least, are aimed at benefiting ourselves.

Each individual experiences peace and happiness from within. Achieving this is an essential factor for living a stable life and finding sustainable peace and happiness. Without inner peace, external successes don't have much meaning. Our peace and happiness is primarily dependent on our inner state of being. If we enjoy inner peace and happiness, and at the same time we meet with favourable external circumstances such as good health and prosperity, they will add more meaning to our lives.

The primary cause of obtaining inner peace and happiness is having the correct state of mind. If our state of mind is calm, clear and positive, we find peace and stability. If our state of mind is disturbed due to mental afflictions, we experience unhappiness and suffering. Therefore, we need to develop positive states of mind and rid ourselves of negative ones in order to tap into peace and happiness.

The self is made up of mind and body. The fact that we refer to the mind and the body as my mind and my body and to speech as my speech indicates that the self is a separate entity from our mind, body and speech. However, the self has a close link with the mind, and body. The state of mind in particular is a very important factor in determining the well-being of the self. In fact, the state of mind is linked to the health of the body. All our activities of body and speech are presided over by the mind. If the mind is peaceful and calm, the result is that all our actions, naturally become peaceful and wholesome. If our mind is disturbed, our actions also become disturbed.

We know from our own experience that when our mind is disturbed, we find it impossible to find lasting peace and happiness. If we find it through some external favourable conditions, it won't last long. To find peace and happiness, we need to free our mind from mental afflictions and to bring it under our control. This is why we need to meditate.

In meditation we use mindfulness to retain our focus on the meditation object and alertness to discern. Mindfulness here means remembrance of the object, whereas awareness is an intelligence of the mind, which has the function of discerning right from wrong. With the aid of these two tools, meditation trains our mind to remain on our chosen object and under our control, rather than being under the control of any disturbing thoughts or mental afflictions.

It is important to recognise that actions or deeds are preceded by a thought. The Buddhist concept of the law of karma is related to the idea that the mind is the source of all our actions and their results. Happiness and suffering results from karma which simply refers to actions that we create through body, speech and mind. As the mind is the primary source of all our actions, whether they will be positive or negative depends on the positivity or negativity of the mind that motivates them.

The Lord Buddha said that you are your own protector. He is also saying here that by subduing your mind you can be your own best protector, refuge or guide. Given this fact, we need to understand that our future is in our own hands. We have the choice to avoid any actions which will bring harm towards ourselves or others.

We also have the choice to cultivate positive states of mind such as loving kindness and compassion, which cause our actions to be beneficial to others and to our self. We need to be more aware of the results of our actions. Negative actions not only destroy our peace and happiness and make us suffer in the immediate time frame, they can also bring much more suffering in the distant future. Similarly, positive actions and a mental attitude of love and compassion for other beings benefits them and ourselves immediately, as well as in the future.

It is important to understand that if we carry out actions that benefit others, they will also benefit ourselves. If we create actions which destroy the joy and happiness of other beings, that very same action also destroys our own joy and happiness. If you harm other beings, you are harming yourself too.

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Reflecting and developing knowledge about mind, actions and results of actions gives us an insight into what to accept and reject in our life. From this we will know the meaning of life, what to do and what not to do. Therefore, whatever we do and however we live; if we focus on cultivating and maintaining love and compassion for other beings, we will bring joy and happiness to all beings including ourselves.

The key practice here is to observe one's thoughts and actions, particularly the thoughts. Regarding this, the great master Shantideva said that prior to physically or verbally carrying out any actions, one should observe one's thoughts. If one holds, or is on the verge of, any negative mental attitudes such as hatred, craving or jealousy one should then stop the action. For example, don't speak and remain in silence. Before undertaking any activities think about them and consider the consequences. If we think before acting, we are making a choice, but to make the right choice we need to use intelligence.

We will now do breathing meditation for a short time. Reflect on the benefits of meditation. The primary purpose is to calm one's mind and to remove negative states. By 'negative states of mind' we are talking about harmful thoughts and mental attitudes such as pride, jealousy and wanting to compete with others, which serve as a source of restlessness and unhappiness. Meditation enhances calmness, peace and happiness within your mind, and as a result of that, enhances and encourages more hope, vision, positive thoughts, inner strength and self-confidence. When we have within us a state of mind that is calm and peaceful, it has an impact on our health, resulting in more balance in our physical systems, which in turn improves our physical health, including our complexion, giving a longer life span due to the improved blood and wind circulation in our body.

We should always begin our meditation practice by removing all distracting thoughts and mental defilements. It is due to these distractions that our mind doesn't know how to rest, but is always wandering off in all directions, all over the place, to different objects. The result is more tension, stress and anxiety for us, therefore we should try to forget about all of the wandering, distracting thoughts. Let the mind fully settle in stillness and allow the vividness of the to mind manifest. Then, simply direct the mind to the incoming and outgoing breath.

When we manage to retain our full focus, even if only for a short moment, we will experience a deep sense of peace and joy. If a person has never meditated before, experiencing such a deep sense of peace and happiness for the first time is memorable. If you are a beginner, you won't be able to retain the focus for a long period. In order to increase the duration of the single-pointed focus, it is recommended that you should shorten the duration, but increase the number of meditation sessions. In this way, you will be able to gradually increase your single-pointed meditative concentration.

*[Pause for single-pointed breathing meditation]*

As we chant the mantra, keep the mental focus on the sound of the mantra and then ensure that you keep the

mind inward rather than being distracted by disturbing thoughts and other distractions.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA.

Thank you all for coming to the discourse and for your good attention.

This is our last gathering for the year, so I want to thank you all for your attendance and support for the program throughout the year. We all come here together in the spirit of friendship. As good friends, we are trying to help each other, so I hope the program is beneficial to all of us. Some people have expressed their appreciation of the teaching program. I would like to thank them for that. For my part, my intention to teach Dharma is solely to benefit others as a helping friend. I always think about the topic and prepare for the teaching before I come here. I also ensure my motivation is correct. Other than benefiting others, I do not have any ulterior motive for giving Dharma talks, nor do I regard my talks as a way to show off my knowledge. I thank you all for the opportunity to teach Dharma, because through this I have personally benefited a lot. I think when we get together here, it is important to cultivate a spirit of true friendship. Out of the spirit of friendship, we can help and benefit each other.

Christmas is one of the most important festive events. I will be off to India the day after tomorrow, so I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. I look forward to resuming the teaching program next year and for many more years.

*Transcribed by Bernii Wright  
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